

Engineer or employee? Professional and multiple organizational identifications in the engineering sector

Morten Sars



Master's Thesis in Organization, Leadership, and Work.
Department of Sociology and Human Geography
Faculty of Social Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

May 15th, 2014

Engineer or employee?

A qualitative study of professional and multiple organizational identifications in the engineering sector

© Morten Sars

2014

Engineer or employee? Professional and multiple organizational identifications in the engineering sector

Morten Sars

<http://www.duo.uio.no/>

Print: Coor Media, Høvik

Executive Summary

Within an organizational context, the individual have numerous available targets of identification with which they may identify simultaneously. In this thesis, this plurality of identifications is discussed in light of the construct *multiple simultaneous identifications*. The modern society and the modern organizational sphere is characterized by increased flexibility, reflexivity, and uncertainty, which both generates a stronger need for individuals to identify with social entities and causes the individuals to maintain and adhere to a multitude of identities and identifications simultaneously. Furthermore, organizational identification is associated with an array of positive and beneficial outcomes for both organizations and individuals. Therefore, identification in an organizational context constitutes a pivotal part of organizational studies. Engineers are generally considered to maintain a strong identification with the engineering profession, which in turn have implications for the identification with their employing organizations. The thesis' main objective is to investigate the relationships between the multiple (organizational and professional) identifications available for engineers in the engineering sector.

Following the theoretical framework from social identity theory and self-categorization theory, an analysis of seven in-depth interviews with previous employees of DNV GL exposed and elucidated three important topics. First, the engineers identify more fundamentally with their profession than with their employing organization, and the relationship between the professional identification and organizational identification have important outcomes for both organization and individual. The analysis did reveal that a strong professional identification would enhance the organizational identification, as long as the organization were considered a professional organization. Secondly, a model of dual identifications in a time of job change is presented, elaborating on four ideal typical salience scenarios (*replacement*, *concurring continuation*, *recurring continuation*, and *no identification*). Finally, I have discussed the complexity of multiple simultaneous identifications in the engineering sector. Maintaining identification with several targets simultaneously both appears to be feasible and have important individual and organizational consequences.

In addition to an engineering-specific contribution to the multiple identifications literature in social psychology, the thesis also have a practical outlook. Lately, there has been an emerging tendency for private sector companies to implement (or at least talk about implementing) organizational alumni programs for their former employees. Such alumni programs are assumed to evoke a prolonged identification with the alma mater, which in turn append to the already existing organizational and professional identifications available for the individual. The study indicates that, in the engineering sector, organizational alumni programs are both feasible and advantageous for both individual and organization. Although a limited data material, the findings in the thesis is both applicable for the identification processes for engineers in general as well as for other professions.

Preface

I ended up writing about multiple identifications due to a series of incidental events. The initial thesis proposal encompassed the utilization of ‘brand ambassadors’ in DNV GL. However, in a meeting with DNV GL, the notion of organizational alumni surfaced and I spotted an opportunity to enter uncharted waters. Organizational alumni is an emerging concept among practitioners, while being largely unresearched in academia. I thus decided to employ an existing social psychological framework to investigate the feasibility and the nature of multiple simultaneous identifications in the engineering sector, which may be considered as both an antecedent for and a product of organizational alumni programs. The result turned out to be an academic contribution to the field of multiple identification with a functional practitioner derivative.

The process of writing the thesis has been simultaneously enlightening, frustrating, and immensely enthusing. As a consequence, I have become more conscious of my own identities and identifications and I have habitually started to contemplate on their implications for me.

Several people (which whom I identify) have made this thesis possible and conceivable. I will start by directing a colossal ‘thank you’ to DNV GL, and especially the Employer Branding team, for giving me access to the data material and for the opportunity to write the thesis in cooperation with you.

I will also like to thank Kristina Dahlberg for rendering possible the cooperation in the first place, Håkon Svebak for guidance and persistency, and my mentor Haldor Byrkjeflot for valuable academic input. Last, but not least, I would like to direct my sincere thanks to Maria Elisabeth Holter, for both indispensable input and endurance in a hectic period.

Oslo, May 12th 2014

Morten Sars

Content

Table of Figures	XI
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Flexibility and the labour market.....	2
1.2 Alumni and their alma mater	3
1.2.1 Organizational alumni	4
1.3 Situating multiple organizational identification	5
1.4 Topic Questions and field of study.....	6
2 Theory	8
2.1 Organizational identification	8
2.1.1 What is organizational identification?.....	9
2.1.2 Why do people identify with organizations?.....	11
2.2 Social identity approach and the organization.....	12
2.2.1 Social identity theory (SIT).....	12
2.2.2 Self-categorization theory (SCT)	14
2.3 Multiple targets of identifications.....	16
2.3.1 Simultaneity and foci of identification.....	17
2.3.2 Vertical identification.....	19
2.3.3 Horizontal identification	20
2.3.4 Identification to a profession.....	21
2.4 Summary.....	23
3 Data and methods	25
3.1 Choice of method.....	25
3.2 Previous DNV GL employees	25
3.2.1 The respondents.....	27
3.3 Grounded theory in theory and practice	27
3.3.1 Conceptual interviewing	29
3.3.2 Analysis: categorization and coding	30
3.4 Limitations.....	31
3.4.1 Translation.....	32
3.4.2 Objectivity	32
3.4.3 Generalizability	33

3.5	Ethical considerations.....	34
3.5.1	Informed consent.....	34
3.5.2	Confidentiality.....	34
3.5.3	The researcher's role	35
3.6	Summary.....	35
4	Analysis: Multiple identification to professions and organizations	36
4.1	Engineers and identification in an organizational context.....	36
4.1.1	Why identification with what?	36
4.1.2	Replacing or prevailing identifications	42
4.1.3	A model of transitional identifications in an organizational context	46
4.1.4	Summary	49
4.2	Professional versus organizational identification	50
4.2.1	Cause... ..	50
4.2.2	...and effect	53
4.2.3	Summary	55
4.3	Multiple simultaneous identification	55
4.3.1	A loyalty conflict?	58
4.3.2	Conjoining orders of identification – higher and lower	60
5	Discussion and conclusion	62
5.1.1	Abridging the questions	62
5.2	Implications for organizations and individuals	65
5.3	Conclusion and a note on future research.....	66
	References	68
	Appendix 1: Figures	72
	Appendix 2: Interview guide.....	73
	Appendix 3: Information letter.....	75
	Appendix 4: Background information form.....	76

Table of Figures

Figure 1. Multiple identification on the vertical and horizontal axis.....	18
Figure 2. A brief overview of the respondents	27
Figure 3. A hypothetical model of transitional identifications in an organizational context ...	47
Figure 4. Multiple targets of identification, both vertically and horizontal.	56
Figure 5. Nested and cross-cutting identities (Ashforth and Johnson 2001: 33)	72

1 Introduction

Identification with social groups is a fundamental process for social beings (Pratt 1998: 171). Affectively and cognitively, social beings such as ourselves navigates the world in relation to other social beings and within the frames of larger social entities, such as, for example, states, organizations, and work groups. In today's modern society, individuals have a multitude of social entities with which they may identify, and they usually maintain a large number of connections and attachments, both in the private sphere and in the working life. These connections and attachments are utterly important for the individual and the individuals choose, change, and alter their many attachments on a regular basis. These connections and attachments are best assessed through the concept of *social identification* (Scott 1997: 492).

Organizational identification represents a distinct form of social identification, and it denotes the process where the individual's beliefs and attitudes towards an organization come to be self-defining and self-referential, in other words, a part of the individual's self-concept (Ashforth and Mael 1989: 22; Pratt 1998: 172). In the engineering sector, which is this thesis' field of study, the engineers may identify with organizations, but also with entities within each organization as well as their profession. Engineers are generally considered to maintain a strong identification with the engineering profession, and this may have implication for the identification with their employing organizations (Anderson et al. 2010). Primarily, this thesis will investigate the relationships between the multiple (organizational and professional) identifications available in the engineering sector.

Following a framework based on the social psychological *social identity approach*, I will investigate the experience and knowledge gathered from seven in-depth interviews with former employees of DNV GL, a large, international classification society with a long and solid history in the engineering sector. The knowledge gathered from these interviews will prospectively add to the existing literature on the field of multiple identification in organizational psychology, but also develop some insights on engineering-specific identification processes, which is a practically underdeveloped field.

Although the principal aim is an empirical and theoretical contribution to the research on professional and multiple organizational identification, the thesis also have a practical outlook.

Recently, there seems to be a proliferation (at least in terms of talk)¹ of organizational alumni programs in the private sector in Norway (and elsewhere) (Sjøberg 2013; The Economist 2014). Organizational alumni, a concept appropriated from the realm of higher education, denominate a more or less formalized system of interaction between the organization and its former employees, usually embodied in exclusive lectures, parties, dinners, and equivalent social or professional events. The assumption is that when employees (in this case engineers) join alumni programs organized by their previous employer(s), it has important implications for the identification with both the current employer and the previous. In the following introduction, I will lay the ground for the scientific importance of studying multiple identification in an organizational context. First, I will elaborate on the modern labour market and the consequent novel forms of employee-employer relationships before further discussing the notion of organizational alumni. Finally, a short introduction to multiple identification will amalgamate into the topic questions.

1.1 Flexibility and the labour market

The transition to a constantly more (post)modern society have induced a couple of changes relevant for the individual identification processes. The first substantial change involves the general sentiment that society becomes increasingly more flexible and fluctuant, *liquid* in the words of the famous sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2000). Widespread digitalization and globalization renders the world more uncertain, thus changing the way social beings behave towards other social beings and social entities (Schiefloe 2003: 455). Bauman suggests that in the liquid modernity traditional identities (such as class, nation, sex, etc.) diminishes in chorus with the dissolution of the institutional pillars in the “solid” modernity (Aakvaag 2008: 280). Similarly, Anthony Giddens (1991) argues that the (post)modern society is characterized by *reflexivity* and a *reflexive self*, where you no longer inherit traditionally ascribed identities based on your social positions. Maintaining and creating identities has become an individualized job (Aakvaag 2008: 276-277). Moreover, social psychologists argue that the post-industrial society is characterized by an identity diversity, an subsequent tolerance for this form of diversity, and a trend that individuals changes and alters their identity frequently throughout the course of

¹ Whether there has been an actual increase in organizational alumni programs is difficult to say, but least the organizational alumni-concept has gained a lot of attention and “buzz”

their lives (Albert, Ashforth, and Dutton 2000: 14). These development trends have spillover effects throughout all spheres of the social life.

A second, ensuing development takes place in the organizational sphere. Traditionally, the labour market were characterized by a life-long career in the bureaucratic firm, together with a solid and physical collegial fellowship (Fivelsdal, Nordhaug, and Bakka 2004: 413; Sullivan 1999). Now, the solidity and the life-long careers have given way for flexibility, diffuse networks, virtual and non-physical working methods, and so on. Organizations are constantly evolving in order to meet new trends and demands both among consumers and in the labour market, and human relations and the knowledge workers' skills and competences has become the top resources (Fivelsdal, Nordhaug, and Bakka 2004: 414-415).

These changes have implications for the employee-organization relationships. Some scholars have argued that modern careers transverse the boundaries of the organization, what is often labelled *boundaryless careers* owing to a change in the psychological employment contract (Sullivan 1999; Arthur and Rousseau 1996). The old psychological contract was characterized by a lucid exchange of employee loyalty for employer security, whereas in the new form of contract the employees exchange knowledge and performance with "continuous learning and marketability", and this has decreased the employees' loyalty towards their employing organizations, as well as decreased the employees' security (Sullivan 1998: 458). Others, however, argue that the attachment between the individual and the organization actually are becoming more tightly connected *because* of the rapid changes in the modern day labour market, because the social exchange relation actually becomes increasingly more important for both employee and employer in an era of fluctuation (Van Dick 2004: 171). This may be ascribed to the need for social identification inherent to human beings. In short, we live in a flexible and fluctuant world, characterized by an equivalent flexible and fluctuant organizational sphere. The social ties connecting social beings and social entities are also changing, and the notion of multiple identifications seems characteristic for the postmodern world.

1.2 Alumni and their alma mater

Formal and informal alumni networks have been a part of higher education systems since the beginning of the 19th century, especially in America, but also in Norway and other countries

(Mael and Ashforth 1992: 106). An *alumnus* (plural of *alumni*) is a school, college or university graduate and the school, college or university from which the alumni graduated are often called the *alma mater*.

Scholars have almost unanimously pointed to the positive effects of the reciprocal relationship between university alumni and their alma mater. For instance did researchers find that alumni have positive impact on donor behaviour, in addition to providing other important services to their alma mater such as “serve on advisory boards, assist in capital campaigns, talk to prospective customers (students and parents), provide cooperative education and employment opportunities for students and graduates, etc.” (Heckman and Guskey 1998: 98; Newman and Petrosko 2011). For the alumni, participation in alumni networks are found to provide “intellectual stimulation, prestige, [and] identity stability” (Mael and Ashforth 1992: 106), among other things. However, the degree of alumni involvement, which is largely a matter of affiliation and identification, is decisive for the functioning of the reciprocal relationship.

1.2.1 Organizational alumni

Deriving from the educational phenomenon alumni, *organizational alumni* (also called *corporate alumni* or *corporate social networking*) encompasses a non-educational organization’s previous employees. Although an emerging concept in the private sphere, little academic research has examined organizational alumni programs, and most of the contributions are practitioner literature short on adequate empirical evidence. In the following, I will elaborate on some key academic contributions.

As in the educational sphere, studies on organizational alumni have revealed some beneficial outcomes for organizations’ investing in alumni programs. For instance, Basioudis (2007) found evidence of a moderate fee reduction for audit firms if alumni of the audit firm held a position in the client board of directors. Similarly, Lennox and Park (2007) demonstrated that companies were more inclined to engage audit firms in situations where previous employees of the latter held officer positions in the former. These two studies demonstrate that maintaining and exploiting alumni relations may generate substantial returns of investment for companies.

Barlatier et al. (2013) observed a vast strategic potential for cultivating organizational alumni networks. Studying three companies, named Audit, Tax, and Ind, the authors draw attention to several key beneficial returns of maintaining good relationships with organizational alumni. In

the Audit firm, the three main benefits were (1) human resource management (HRM), (2) business opportunities, and (3) brand image (Barlatier et al. 2013: 169). In terms of (1) HRM, alumni networks were found to advance and facilitate the process of re-hiring, or the “boomeranging”, of previous employees, and alumni may facilitate recruitment by offering hiring recommendation (Barlatier et al. 2013: 169). (2) An organizational alumni network, although not its primary purpose, may also provide the alma mater company with important information about the development of business opportunities, and the previous employees, if treated properly, may function as great (3) ambassadors for the company brand (Barlatier et al. 2013: 171).

However beneficial for the firms, the increasing focus and initialization of alumni programs among private sphere firms may be problematic for the individual. The frequency of job change has increased and the identification processes are transforming (cf. the previous section). For the individual, maintaining multiple relationships through alumni networks with several employers simultaneously appears hard and even unsustainable, since (s)he arguably would experience loyalty conflicts between the different previous employers, and, more importantly, towards her current employer. This example illustrates that there are not just benefits, but also potential unintended consequences and pitfalls with organizing your previous employees in alumni networks.

The notion of “multiple simultaneous identifications” encompasses the situation where individuals identify themselves with several entities simultaneously. As I will elaborate on later, identification may concurrently occur with different organizations, but also with different levels within the organization, which has implication for both individual and organization.

1.3 Situating multiple organizational identification

From the time when Tajfel and Turner and their colleagues began to couple theories of social identity and self-categorization to the concept of organizational identification in the 1970s and 80s (Tajfel 1978, 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1985; Turner 1987), several literature reviews have been conducted revealing the importance of studying identification processes in an organizational setting (see for example Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008; Hogg and Terry 2001; Pratt 1998).

Research on social (and therefore organizational) identification is important because it is an essential part of human nature. Moreover, social identification has proved a major determinant for social behaviour (van Knippenberg and van Schie 2000; Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008; Edwards 2005) and therefore the process of identification in an organizational context are imperative for both organizational and individual behaviour, attitudes, and outcomes. As social identification indicates the process where the individual incorporate beliefs about a social entity into his or her self-concept, the concept of multiple simultaneous identification denotes a similar process only with multiple social entities simultaneously (Pratt 1998: 172-173; Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008: 347). However, the notion of multiple simultaneous identifications carry some implications, such as questions of conflicting loyalties and salience levels, as well as individual and organizational outcomes. Whereas the research on social and organizational identification is extensive, several researches have indicated a lack of, and the ensuing need for, further research on multiple identifications (Ashforth 1998; Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008; Pratt 1998; Scott 1997: 496; He and Brown 2013).

1.4 Topic Questions and field of study

Summarized, the underlying argumentation is this: in the (post)modern society individuals have a multitude of social entities with which they can identify. Additionally, there is a tendency for private sector companies to implement alumni programs for their former employees. Such alumni programs necessarily evoke a prolonged identification with the alma mater, which in turn append to the already existing organizational and professional identifications available for the individual. This notion of multiple targets of identification is insufficiently researched, while at the same time being a ubiquitous and important aspect of the modern organizational sphere.

In the engineering sector, there are evidently few or no alumni programs yet available for the engineers, and thus a focus on alumni programs would have been overly hypothetical and suppositious. Therefore, I decided to attend to multiple identification in general rather than alumni identification in particular. The process of multiple identification will have consequences for the development, the maintenance, and the possibility and probability for such programs even to exist in the engineering sector. Given that engineers may identify with multiple organizations, the profession, as well as lower order groups within the organization simultaneously, the principle topic question presented here is rather ample:

What constitutes the nature of multiple simultaneous identifications in the engineering sector?

The nature of multiple simultaneous identifications, however, consists of several elements. First, it involves the issue of multiple *organizational* identifications. How can an individual identify with two or more organizations simultaneously, such as current and previous employers? What determines the salience of one identification over the other? Secondly, it involves identification with multiple entities *within* an organization. Does an engineer identify with his job or his project team, or does (s)he identify primarily with the organizational identity? What determines the salience of the different levels of identification? Third, it is the question of the multiple *general* identifications present in the engineering sector. What is the relationship between the professional identity and organizational identity in terms of identification? Moreover, what about the identification to the industry in general compared to the specific organization? Evidently, all these questions are related. In order to abridge the questions and elucidate the subsequent analysis, I epitomize the questions into two subordinate topic questions:

a. How does the identification process unfold for an engineer changing jobs?

b. What is the relationship between an engineer's professional identification and organizational identification?

In order to answer these questions, I cooperated with DNV GL to get access to the field. DNV GL is a professional organization with a history ranging back to 1864, and the empirical data in this thesis is previous employees of the organization.

I will commence the following analysis by elaborating on social psychological theories on identification. In particular, social identity theory and self-categorization theory provides the framework for the subsequent analysis. Thereafter, I will elaborate on practical and theoretical aspects associated with conducting qualitative interviews. To some extent, the method and data analysis is based on a grounded theory approach. Subsequently, I will present the empirical evidence and the analysis in three sections, starting with general identification in organizations, through a discussion of professionalism and the professional identification's impact on organizational identification, before concluding with an analysis of the findings in light of the notion of multiple simultaneous identifications.

2 Theory

For the greater part, this thesis utilizes social psychological theories on organizational identification. Drawing on the *social identity approach*, the following section provides a brief overview on the underlying processes constituting identification in an organizational context. There is a multitude of theories attempting to describe the fundamental relationships between employee and employer, such as network theories, sociological theories on identity, theories on organizational commitment, person-organizational-fit, etc., and either one of these theories would have provided different analyses. Nevertheless, I chose to utilize the social identity approach because it provides, in my opinion, the best framework for understanding the core processes of organizational identification and it offers a facile translation of theory into practice, as illustrated by the large number of empirical studies (for an illustrative overview, see Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008). Furthermore, the social identity approach, because of the focus on cognitive identity and identification processes, allows for careful appraisals concerning the nature of multiple identification in organizational settings.

In this section, I will start by describing the nature and process of organizational identification, before I direct the attention to theories on professional identification. Finally, I will elaborate on the relatively unexplored concept of *multiple simultaneous identification*.

2.1 Organizational identification

Introductorily, I noted that social identification, and therefore organizational identification, is a fundamental process for human beings. An essential concept in the organizational psychology, scientists have revealed that organizational identification have a great array of effects for both the organization and the employee. For example, strong organizational identification is said to enhance loyalty, make employees act in accordance with organizational goals, increase cooperation, and increase performance, inter alia (Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008: 336; Edwards 2005: 207; Ashforth and Mael 1989: 22). Evident effects for the employees are said to be intrinsic motivation, self-enhancement, prestige, safety, and more (van Knippenberg and van Schie 2000; Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008: 337; Pratt 1998: 181-183). Although much emphasis have been laid on the positive outcomes of strong organizational identification, too strong organizational identification among members are associated with negative outcomes (Dukerich, Kramer, and Parks 1998).

The aim of this study is not a literary review, since it has been done elsewhere (see for example Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008; Ashforth and Mael 1989; Hogg and Terry 2001; He and Brown 2013; Riketta 2005; Edwards 2005). I will here focus on the two most prominent social psychological theories about organizational identification within the social identity approach: the social identity theory (SIT), predominantly developed by Tajfel (1978, 1981) and colleagues, and the related theory of self-categorization (SCT), as presented by Turner (1987). First, however, I will elaborate on the construct of organizational identification.

2.1.1 What is organizational identification?

Organizational identification “is an identity-based theory of organizational attachment” (Pratt 1998: 179). Implicitly in this lies a tenet that identification is inseparably interconnected with identity: you identify with a social group’s identity, and the identification with that social group’s identity defines and develops your social and personal identity. Pratt (1998: 171) presents a convenient distinction between identity and identification:

Whereas identity is often concerned with the question, “Who am I?” identification asks, “How do *I* come to know who I am in relation to *you*?” [...] the “you” that “I” use to define myself is often the organization(s) in which I participate.

The relationship between identity and identification is, in other words, relational and in order to understand the latter, one first have to understand the former (Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008: 327). Drawing on SIT and SCT, one can differentiate between a *social identity* and a *personal identity*. Social identity involves the part of you deriving from the “knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel (1978: 63), quoted in Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008: 327), whereas personal identity involves the personal sense of uniqueness, encompassing personal traits, interests, and more (Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008: 327). Whereas the personal identity is unique for one individual, the social identities are shared by the group’s members. All groups contain a social identity which distinguishes the group from other groups (Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008: 327), and individuals define themselves in light of their membership groups. In other words, they identify with a group’s identity.

Organizational identification has been defined in several different ways. Drawing on some of the most prominent definitions of organizational identification during the last fifty years, Riketta (2005: 361) proposes that organizational identification occurs when organizational

members, either emotionally, cognitively, or both, ties their organizational membership to their self-concept. In a more nuanced view, Pratt (1998: 172-173) argues that “organizational identification occurs when an individual’s beliefs about his or her organization become self-referential or self-defining”. In other words, organizational identification has a *cognitive* side, where the individual feel and acknowledge a membership in a social group, an *evaluative* side, involving some personal value assessment related to the social group, and an *emotional* side, where the individual emotionally invest in the awareness and evaluation of the group (Tajfel 1982: 2). In short, the core attributes of identification can be summarized by “I am A, I value A (it’s important to me, and I feel about A)” (Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008: 328).

Pratt (1998) distinguishes between identification through *affinity* and identification through *emulation*. In the former, individuals seek to tie with organizations with similar identity, beliefs, and values as herself. The individual use her own identity as a reference point for determining whether the identity of the organization in question are similar to her own self. Thus, this process is *self-referential*, and also support Ashforth and Mael’s (1989) definition of identification as a “feeling of oneness” (Pratt 1998: 174; Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008: 329). Identification through emulation involves an individual’s adaptation and incorporation of the organizational identity into her own identity (Pratt 1998: 174). This is a *self-defining* perspective on the identification process (Tajfel 1982; Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008; Pratt 1998).

Many definitions of organizational identifications presupposes the relationship between a social group and members of this social group. Nevertheless, identification does not necessarily only occur with organizations in which you already are a member. In other words, an individual may strongly identify herself with the values and beliefs of an organization without necessarily being formerly attached to it. This notion of “organizational groupies” have, according to Pratt (1998: 174-175), generally been neglected in studies of organizational identification. However, in an organizational world characterized by boundarylessness and fluctuation (cf. the section 1.1), studies on organizational identification among non-members are increasingly important. Therefore, following Pratt (1998: 172), I propose an equivalent, but slightly nuanced, definition of organizational identification: *organizational identification occurs when an individual’s beliefs about an organization become self-referential or self-defining*. On a different note it is still important to keep in mind that organizational identification necessarily grow more intense for members, whole feelings of belongingness with the organization probably is stronger.

Finally, it is important to differentiate between organizational identification and identification within an organizational context. According to Rotondi (1975: 97),

[...] the term ‘organizational identification’ refers to identification with the employing organization as a whole, rather than with alternative targets such as individuals, occupational activities, work positions, task groups, or reference groups

This is important for the following analysis, because it both focuses on organizational identification and other forms of identification within the organizational sphere, such as professional/occupational identification, job identification, industry identification, and more. In this view, organizational identification is only one out of many different identifications an employee may hold.

2.1.2 Why do people identify with organizations?

Some scholars portray social identification as a basic human function, but presenting identification in terms of biology does little to explain instrumental and other motivational answers to the question of why people identify with organizations. Four more or less instrumental factors may answer this question; safety needs, affiliation needs, self-enhancements needs, and holistic needs. First, (1) organizational identification may provide both psychological and physical safety for the individual. Feelings of trust and safety are basic psychological needs ensured by the perception of redundancy and predictability in the environment (Pratt 1998: 181; Maslow 1943). Secondly, (2) identification also satisfy the social needs for belonging and affiliation; identification cures social isolation and alienation (Pratt 1998: 182).

Individuals strive to achieve a positive view of themselves, and thus identifying with entities likely to induce their (3) self-enhancement (Pratt 1998: 183). Strong organizational identities may cause self-enhancement in several way, inter alia by “providing status and prestige” or if it “makes people feel distinctive or special” (Pratt 1998: 183). Finally, the (4) holistic aspect addresses the uncertainty and ambiguity associated with organizational membership. In an organizational world characterized by global competition, organizational downsizing, WLB (work-life-balance) problems, and rapid market changes, individuals strive to “find deeper meanings that help reorder and perhaps even simplify their lives” (Pratt 1998: 183). In order to feel ‘whole’, strong identification with organization with coinciding values and beliefs may be an adequate solution.

2.2 Social identity approach and the organization

During the 1970s, Tajfel, Turner, and their colleagues started to develop theories about social identity and social categorization, what is labelled the social identity approach in social psychology (Tajfel 1978, 1981; Turner 1999: 6; Hogg and Terry 2001: 2-3). The social identity approach suggests that in addition to a personal identity people have a social identity, i.e. a collective self, that together constitute an individual's self-concept (Hogg and Vaughan 2005: 408). From the initial theorizing emerged the *social identity theory* (SIT) in the mid-1970s and the ensuing sister theory *self-categorization theory* (SCT). Although relatively similar at first glance, SIT and SCT are different insofar as the latter signify a continuation of the former, as well as representing a "major expansion in the range of applicability of the social identity tradition" (Turner 1999: 6). Both theories utilize the same concept of social identity, as first defined by Tajfel (1972: 292, quoted by Hogg and Terry 2001: 2) as "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of his group membership".

2.2.1 Social identity theory (SIT)

The core assumption in SIT is that people is inclined to "classify themselves and others into various social categories" (Ashforth and Mael 1989: 20). We categorize groups in terms of prototypical characteristics with the group's members. The categorization creates cognitive orderliness in a person's social environment, and it serves as a basis for social comparison, which "enables the individual to locate or define *him- or herself* in the social environment" (Ashforth and Mael 1989: 21). Further, we define and locate ourselves relative to members of other categories. For example, the category "student" is meaningless without other comparable categories, such as "employee", "retired", etc. In other words, social categorization serves as a cognitive tool for placing your own self in society, and the categories comprises a person's social identity (Pratt 1998: 187).

The available literature on SIT is far too vast to reiterate here. I will thus focus on three aspects of SIT highlighted by Pratt (1998) particularly relevant in terms of organizational identification. First, the process of categorization is "a basic cognitive process" (Pratt 1998: 187). This suggests that individuals feels like they are a part of the group even in situations where the individuals do not feel a strong connection with the group or even interact with it on a regular

basis. Scientists have concluded that identification, by virtue of being a basic cognitive process, “occurs whenever individuals perceive themselves to be a member of a collective” (Pratt 1998: 187). If we turn back to the previous discussion concerning how to define identification, this notion of identification as a fundamental human process supports my claim that organizational identification do not necessarily occur only with organizations where you are already a member. It may also occur with organizations where you are not a member, but to which you *feel* a connection.

Secondly, your social identity is self-regulatory, as it defines your self within the settings of a group and that group’s norms and rules about how to feel, think, and behave (Hogg and Terry 2001: 3). In other words, social identification have strong “perceptual and behavioural outcomes” (Pratt 1998: 187). The third aspect is found in the ingroup-outgroup dichotomy, where members tend to favour the ingroup (Pratt 1998: 187). Following SIT’s minimal group paradigm, this bias in favour of the group also applies in situations where perceptions of ingroup similarities and outgroup differences are non-existent, and it even applies when group membership is randomly assigned (Ashforth and Mael 1989: 24; Turner 1987: 27). In other words, the self-defining and self-regulatory effect of group identification is apparently both robust and omnipresent. These three aspects, as we will see, are of great importance when it comes to the issue of multiple simultaneous identifications.

In SIT terms, the self comprises of several social identities, or several identifications to a number of groups, which all can be invoked, become *salient*, at different times (Hogg and Terry 2001: 3; Ashforth and Johnson 2001: 32). Implicit in this lies that an idea that which group identification is salient is decisive for behavioural and perceptual outcomes, but what determines the salience of one identification over another? Following SIT, Pratt (1998) elaborates on six hypothesis regarding the antecedents of organizational identification, which is easily applicable to other forms of identification. Organizational identification is more likely to occur...

Categorization antecedents

1. ...in distinctive organizations than in organizations, that are not distinctive.
2. ...when outgroups are salient than when they are not salient.
3. ...when there is an absence of intraorganizational competition than when there is such competition.

Self-enhancement antecedents

4. ...when organizations have high prestige than when the organizations lack prestige
5. ...in organizations that are attractive (and have attractive images) than in organizations that are unattractive (and have unattractive images)
6. ...when the perceived organizational identity increases members' self-esteem

(Pratt 1998: 188)

The perceived identification with his organization for employee X is for instance stronger in situations where his own organization is perceived (1) distinct and unique, and when (2) other organization (outgroups) are prominent, such as in meetings and on conferences. In addition, (3) competition and conflict within the organization happens at the sacrifice of identification (Pratt 1998: 188). The three last antecedents implies that when the organization is deemed favourably, identification are likely to be induced (Pratt 1998: 189).

2.2.2 Self-categorization theory (SCT)

The self-categorization theory states that an individual's social identity is "the social-cognitive basis for group behaviour" (Turner 1987: ix), and both individual behaviour and group behaviour are viewed as 'acting in terms of self'. Although SIT and SCT often is used interchangeably, SCT differs in focus. Turner separates the two theories by stating that SIT concerns *intergroup* behaviour (such as discrimination), while SCT "is focused on the explanation not of a specific kind of group behaviour but of how individuals are able to act as a group at all" (Turner 1987: 42). In other words, SCT treat the basic underlying processes for the psychological group, and "the antecedents and consequences of that process" (Turner 1987: 43).

In SCT, cognitive representation of the self are affected and take form by means of a cognitive categorization, i.e. a self-categorization, where one contrasts oneself and equivalent stimuli to other different stimuli (Turner 1987: 44). In other words, the self is defined by the comparison with similar categories and the dissociation from different categories. In general, self-categorization implies that individuals cognitively define and classify themselves within the frames of their group and group behaviour.

An especially important factor in SCT is the notion of prototypes. The categories, or groups, within which we place ourselves and our surroundings are represented as prototypes, based on

our cognitive perceptions of stereotypical attributes associated with the category (Hogg and Terry 2001: 123). Hogg and Terry (2001: 123) describes prototypes as

[...] not checklists of attributes but, rather, fuzzy sets that capture the context-dependent features of group membership, often in the form of representations of exemplary members (actual group members who best embody the group) or ideal types (an abstraction of group features)

An individual, then, ascribe certain social information to groups based on the typical or stereotypical group member, and these prototypes are usually shared by the group members. Thus, the categorization (and the intergroup and intragroup comparison) becomes a part of the members' social identity (Hogg and Terry 2001: 124)

In terms of organizations, two major tenets of the self-categorization theory is that (1) the organizational context is essential for social identity formation and that (2) the individual formation of social categories seek to maximize the differences and similarities between and within group, respectively (Pratt 1998: 190). An elaboration is needed. According to the first tenet, an individual is more likely to feel identified to an organization "when the social context makes salient other organizations" (Pratt 1998: 190), i.e. in intergroup contexts, while an intragroup context will evoke an individual's personal identity. In other words, in a context where you are conscious other organizations, for instance at a customer meeting, you will act on behalf of your organization, thus evoking your social identity. Similarly, in a department level meeting, attended by only co-workers, your personal identity becomes salient. The second tenet implies that upon forming social categories, "individuals always seek to find that category that best accounts for the similarities and differences among stimuli (e.g. people) within the existing social context." (Pratt 1998: 190). Based on the above discussion, following Pratt, three hypothesis may be formulated in terms of organizational identification:

1. Organizational identification is more likely to occur in a social context where other organizations are made salient than in condition where the organization alone is salient. When the organization alone is salient, personal identities are more likely to be evoked.
2. Organizational identification may be difficult when members of the organization are highly heterogeneous. When organizational members are perceived as being too dissimilar, then a personal identity is likely to be evoked.
3. Organizational identification may also be difficult when members of the organization are too much like members of other organizations. When there is too much homogeneity across organization, then more abstract identities (e.g., industry, labourers) are likely to be evoked.

(Pratt 1998: 191)

2.3 Multiple targets of identifications

Before introducing some relevant theories on multiple simultaneous identifications, it is appropriate to answer the question: *What is multiple simultaneous identifications?* Organizational identification is, as we have already seen, a process where an individual's beliefs about *an* organization become self-referential or self-defining, and become a part of your social identity and self-concept (Pratt 1998). Multiple organizational identification, then, denotes the process where the individual incorporate the beliefs about *several* different organizations into his or her social identity. Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley (2008: 347) suggest that individuals have the ability to define themselves in terms of multiple identities simultaneously, implying that an individual harbours multiple identifications at the same time; all of which serves, to a greater or lesser extent, as self-defining and self-referential for the individual, and all of which are likely to become salient in any given situation.

Another important aspect with multiple identification is that it does not only concern the organizational identification, but also other groups such as groups within an organization or the profession. Hogg and Terry (2000: 122) juxtaposes organizations, professions, and lower order groups within the organization, by maintaining that they are, at the most fundamental level, all groups:

We consider organizations to be groups, units or divisions within organizations to be groups, professions or sociodemographic categories that are distributed across organizations to be groups, and so forth – all with different social identities and group prototypes (Hogg and Terry 2000: 122)

In spite of being a group, organizational identification refers to the identification with the organization as a whole (Rotondi 1975: 97). However, the vertical axis (i.e. subunits within the organization) is essential for understanding the process of identification within an organization, since lower order identities often is considered more personally important and relevant for the individual than the higher order identities (Ashforth and Johnson 2001: 35).

Seemingly, the social identity literature on organizational identification largely focus on identification with different abstraction levels *within* the organization (Pratt and Foreman 2000; van Knippenberg and van Schie 2000; Larson and Pepper 2003; Scott 1997; Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008; Barker and Tomkins 1994) and/or the relative salience of organizational identification compared to professional/occupational identification (Johnson et al. 2006; Lammers, Atouba, and Carlson 2013; Wallace 1995; Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008). In

the following, I will elaborate on how SIT/SCT present multiple targets of identification on both the horizontal and the vertical axis in an organizational context. I will start by discussing multiple identifications in general, before turning to professional identification specifically.

2.3.1 Simultaneity and the foci of identification

A prominent discussion related to the multiple nature of identification concerns the question whether it is possible for individuals to simultaneously identify with several social entities. Some scholars argue in accordance with Turner's (1987: 49) concept of *functional antagonism*, that identification to multiple targets take form of a zero-sum relationship (Wallace 1995: 230-231). According to Turner, when an individual face two or more targets of identification, a functional antagonism occurs "between the salience of one level of self-categorization and other levels" (Turner 1987: 49), suggesting that an increased identification with one social entity leads to an ensuing reduced identification with other social entities. Accordingly, Ashforth and Johnson (2001) argue that implicitly in SCT lies a tenet that "social identities are discrete psychological phenomena such that as one identity becomes salient, others necessarily become less so" (2001: 46). This is because self-categorization explicitly involves an accentuation on the differences between your own social group and others, thus making identification with several groups cumbersome (George and Chattopadhyay 2005: 76). In terms of multiple simultaneous identifications, then, the concept of functional antagonism implies that identification with more than one organization, or more than one social unit within the organization, at the same time is cognitively problematic for the individual.

However, others have argued that multiple identification in an organizational context is not a zero-sum process, but both possible and actually an inherent property of modern complex organizations (George and Chattopadhyay 2005: 77; Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008: 347). Ashforth and Johnson (2001: 46) suggests that one ought to address the question of multiple simultaneous identification through the notion of *relative salience*, and they proposes four factors that affects simultaneity:

- 1) The greater the overlap between identities and the generalization of identification, the more likely that the salience of the identities will in turn be positively correlated
- 2) The more relevant multiple identities are to a given context, the more likely that those identities will be explicitly or implicitly cued via substantive and symbolic management

- 3) The more often that multiple identities are invoked wither simultaneously or sequentially, the more likely that a cognitive association will form between them such that invoking one least primes the other
- 4) The more cognitively complex the individual, the more likely it is that he or she can cognitively attend to the demands of multiple identities

(Ashforth and Johnson 2001: 46)

In other words, the possibility and feasibility of multiple identifications are context-dependent, both in terms of the nature of the relevant targets of identification and in terms of external (managerial) influences. In addition, it also depends on the individual's cognitive capabilities for balancing different targets of identification. In sum, following Hornsey and Hogg (2000, paraphrased by George and Chattopadhyay 2005), multiple simultaneous identification with social entities are possible as long as "their central and defining values are compatible rather than dissonant" (2005: 77), implying that coherent targets of identification (such as a professional identification and the organizational identification with a professional organization (Wallace 1995)) facilitates multiple simultaneous identification.

Although there generally seems like there is a consensus that individuals have the ability to simultaneously identify with multiple social entities, scholars have found empirical evidence that there exists a salience hierarchy within organizations, and little research have been conducted in terms of identification *across* organizations. I the following, I will briefly discuss multiple identification on a vertical and a horizontal axis, as illustrated in figure 1.

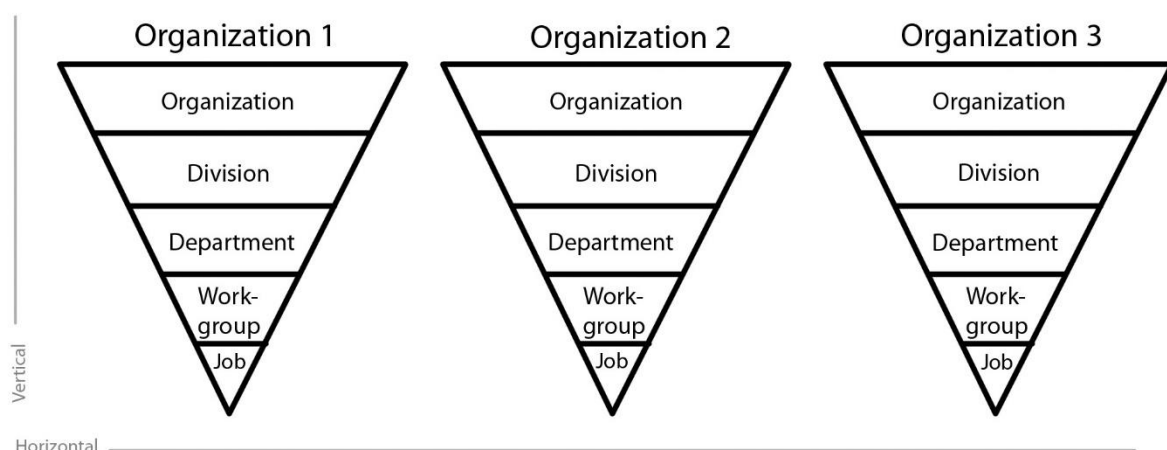


Figure 1. Multiple identification on the vertical and horizontal axis. Loosely inspired by Ashforth and Johnson's (2001: 33 see appendix 1) model of nested and cross-cutting identities.

2.3.2 Vertical identification

The vertical axis of identification in an organizational setting addresses the different abstraction levels *within* the organization, such as the higher (department, organizational identity, etc.) and lower (work group, co-workers, etc.) (Ashforth and Johnson 2001: 31-32; Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008: 347). Organizations are complex social structures and therefore different identities and identifications may be invoked at any given context (Ashforth and Johnson 2001: 31), and Ashforth (2001, in Ashforth and Johnson 2001: 32) argued that to what extent the different levels of identities become salient (the relative salience) “in an organizational context is determined by the identity’s *subjective importance* and *situational relevance*” (Ashforth and Johnson 2001: 32). In other words, how important the given identity is for the individual, and how relevant this identity is for the given situation, determines what identity becomes salient at any given time. A subjectively important identity involves an identity central to the individual’s key preferences, such as goals and values (Ashforth and Johnson 2001: 32). If the manager places a greater emphasis on personal ties than career, the colleague-identity is more likely to become salient than, for example, the manager-identity in interaction with co-workers. In short, the identity’s subjective importance is determined by internal preferences, while the situational relevance of the identity is controlled by external norms (Ashforth and Johnson 2001: 32).

This is also true for organizational *identification*. Dependent on what social group and category is most subjectively important and situationally relevant at a given time, the employee may identify more or less strongly with different levels of abstraction within the organization. Additionally, as I have discussed, identification within an organization is not a singular, zero-sum process (Johnson et al. 2006: 500). An employee may identify with the holistic organizational identity, while simultaneously identify with her department, the project group, as well as the lunch group, and at the same time, she may identify with her professional or occupational identity (Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008: 350-351). Thus, it is useful to assess identification through the notion of a continuum ranging from no identification to unreserved identification.

Supporting Ashforth and Johnson’s idea of relative salience, several influential studies have shown, for instance, that workers are apt to identify more with their workgroup and team than with the higher order organizational identification (van Knippenberg and van Schie 2000; Barker and Tomkins 1994), that the relative salience of identifications varies with the individual’s employment situation (Johnson et al. 2006), and that tenure is decisive for

identification with different targets of the vertical axis (Scott 1997; Barker and Tomkins 1994; Stephens and Dailey 2012). Many studies also include professional identification in research on the vertical axis (Johnson et al. 2006; Lammers, Atouba, and Carlson 2013; Scott 1997). I will elaborate more on the role of professional identification below.

In some organizations, the distance (both literally and figuratively) between the overarching organizational identity and the local identities are larger than in others. To elucidate these differences, Albert and Whetten (1985) introduced the constructs ‘holographic’ and ‘idiographic’ organizations. The former is characterized by a common, organization-wide identity shared by all of the members, while in the latter the organization consists of several different identities. Thus, in holographic organizations the lower and higher order identifications are considered similar, resulting in more holistic intraorganizational similarities. Following SCT, the ingroup hence becomes the organization and the intergroup differences is ascribed other organizations.

2.3.3 Horizontal identification

Horizontal identification refers to identification with different social entities *on the same abstraction level*, such as multiple organizational identifications. For example, an individual may identify with her current employing organization, her previous employers, as well as the spouse’s employer. The literature on this form of multiple identification is, as I have argued, more or less absent. However, some evidence exists, and the identification process will presumably follow the theoretical structure posited by SIT/SCT.

Following SCT, an organization becomes a part of an employee’s social identity when it becomes self-defining and self-referential for her. The organizational identification then becomes salient when she acknowledges the interorganizational differences between her organization and others, and the intraorganizational similarities within the organization. Take, for example, a DNV GL employee. The DNV GL identity becomes a part of her identity as soon as she begin to define herself in terms of the organization (“I am a DNV GL employee”). Based on prototypical images of her social group, she maximises the differences between her social group (DNV GL) and other social groups (Statoil, Aker Solutions, FMC Technologies, etc.). In addition she maximises the similarities within the group, by accentuating the similarities between her apprehension of herself with her apprehension with the other members of the social group (Pratt 1998: 189).

As previously argued, individuals have the ability to maintain several identifications simultaneously. Thus, an employee may encounter a situation where both the current employing organization and previous employer(s) becomes salient, for instance on conferences, in business meetings, or when attending alumni events. However, to my knowledge, no research have been conducted investigating the individual's simultaneous identification with current and previous employers, but some scholars have studied employees' identification with dual organizational targets.

By studying contract workers, George and Chattopadhyay (2005) found that individuals can identify with two targets simultaneously and that impersonal and personal similarities between the organization facilitates identification (2005: 93). Especially personal relationships with individuals in the other organization were decisive for the dual identification. Similarly, in her study of project managers' client engagement in the IT industry, Webber (2011: 124) found that the development of a dual identification with both employing organization and client organization increased both client satisfaction and client loyalty. According to the author, the reason for this was that the dual identifying project managers were able to juxtapose and better integrate the goals of both organization (Webber 2011: 124). These two studies show that multiple organizational identification on the horizontal axis is possible and that it may have positive effects. An interesting observation is that these results are not unlike results found in studies of intergroup relation (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994; Mael and Ashforth 1992; George and Chattopadhyay 2005: 89), suggesting that, after all, organizations is just large groups (Hogg and Terry 2000: 122).

2.3.4 Identification to a profession

Identification to a profession is not the same as organizational identification, but rather a form of social identification prominent within an organizational setting (Rotondi 1975: 97). In general, the profession (or occupation) is considered a social group equivalent to the department, the workgroup, the co-workers, in other words, a type of *subunit identity*, fostering a *subunit identification* (Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008: 347). Similarly, professions have also been discussed in terms of *lower order identities* within an organizational context, as opposed to higher order identities (organizational identity) (Ashforth and Johnson 2001). Others have noted that professional identities exists independent of organizational boundaries (He and Brown 2013: 20; Hogg and Terry 2000: 122). Lammers, Atouba, and Carlson (2013:

508-509) for instance noted that professional identification seems to be qualitatively different than organizational identification, and that it may even have an amplifying or degrading effect on other forms of identification within the organization. Although dissension, professional identification (and other employee identities and identifications) are considered important for both motivational and behavioural outcomes in an organizational context (He and Brown 2013: 20; Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008: 347-348). Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann (2006: 235) suggests that there is a paucity in the research on identification processes among professionals. Since professionals (engineers, doctors, lawyers, etc.) often hold a set of unique skills and knowledge, they are arguably increasingly important in the modern organizational sphere, and thus, the research on professional identity (and identification) is apt (Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann 2006: 235).

By some, identification to a profession is regarded a principle form of identification. In their study of graduate students, Becker and Carper (1956a) elaborates on work identity (equivalent to professional identity) within the fields of physiology, philosophy, and mechanical engineering. They argue that individuals finds it essential to identify themselves with their work, “since general cultural emphases require some occupational attachment, some answer to the ubiquitous question, ‘What’s your line?’” (Becker and Carper 1956a: 290). According to the authors, there are, in other words, an external pressure or expectation for individuals to hold and maintain an occupational identity; it signals who you are. The authors proceed to explain how the professional identities develop through the students’ education. Most of the engineers have already made their choice of occupation before even entering higher education, and their basic identification is hence with engineering, which is also nurtured by a strong engineering socialization (Becker and Carper 1956a: 294). Becker and Caper’s article were written nearly 60 years ago, but the lion’s share of their arguments and observations are still valid today. For example have other recent articles emphasized the role of socialization for identity formation and thus for identification (Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann 2006; Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008).

The empirical and theoretical evidence of the effects of professional identification on organizational identification is not clear-cut. For instance, it varies across types of organizational. Wallace (1995: 229), for instance, differentiate between professionals working in professional organizations and professionals working in non-professional organizations. Professional organizations are characterized by a majority of professional workers, an

alignment of organizational goals and the goals of the employed professionals, and that the professional's tasks is coherent with the organization's mission (Wallace 1995: 229). In their study of veterinarians, (Johnson et al. 2006: 505) suggested that, in general, "for professionals, identification with the organization is less likely when the organization is not integrally linked to their profession". This suggests an additive effect of professional identification in professional organizations: professional identification enhances the identification with the organizations in professional organizations.

Becker and Carper's insights discussed in above implies that engineers are socialized into a certain degree of loyalty to, and identification towards, their profession. At least to some degree, engineers thus seems to fit into Gouldner's (1957) 'cosmopolitans'-category rather than in the 'locals'-category. According to Gouldner, 'cosmopolitans' are employees "low on loyalty to the employing organization, high on commitment to specialized role skills, and likely to use an outer reference group orientation" (Gouldner 1957: 290), while locals have the opposite attributes. In this perspective, engineers are considered to have a higher loyalty (hence identification) to the profession than to the employing organization, and this bias will presumably have consequences. Wallace (1995: 228), for example, maintains that in an organizational context a conflict often arises between professional and organizational goals and ideals. Anderson et al. (2010), through studying six engineering companies in the US, found three distinct characteristics incorporated in a specific form of engineering identity: problem solver, team player, and lifelong learner (2010: 166). Although not examining the engineering identification in an organizational context, their findings indicate that engineers largely concentrate on proximal categories, such as their work, cooperation, knowledge, etc., while to some extent neglecting the overarching organization (Anderson et al. 2010). In sum, then, professional identification seemingly have a unique position and importance in an organizational setting.

2.4 Summary

An essential tenet in the discussion concerning identification in organizations is the question: *which identification is salient at what time?* In other words, when does one organizational identification gain salience over another, and when does lower order identities gain salience over higher order identities? As I have discussed in this section, it is inter alia a question of subjective importance and situational relevance. In general, theory suggests that lower order

identities and identifications have prominence over higher order identities and identification because it is both more situationally relevant (we are more often addressing local identifies than more abstract ones) and subjectively important (on a daily basis, we are encountering representatives of local identities more frequently than representatives of higher order ones) (Ashforth and Johnson 2001: 35). In other words, we operate more regularly in an intraorganizational context, which induces lower order identifications. This implies that the higher order identifications becomes salient when encountering a interorganizational setting (Pratt 1998)

Presumably, some identifications are *on average* more salient than others are, partly because some identifications generally are more subjective important. For engineers, then, the profession and professional tasks and relations are essential. For the engineers, the professional identification and work group/team identification is thus gain salience more habitually than higher order identifications within an organization. In this section, I have largely discussed antecedents of identification. Numerous researchers have investigated the consequences of different types of identification within an organizational setting. In general, the different foci of identification (profession, job, workgroup, organization, etc.) and the different dimension associated with identification (cognitive, affective, evaluative, behavioural) are found to have different impact on both work-related attitudes and behaviours (van Dick et al. (2004). I will focus more on the consequences in the later analysis of the data material.

3 Data and methods

3.1 Choice of method

As argued, the literature on multiple simultaneous identifications is insufficient. Thus, in order to provide adequate answers to the topic questions, I needed empirical evidence to support the available literature. Most of the existing research on multiple simultaneous identifications utilizes established quantitative methods which have been developed through decades, such as the Organizational Identification Questionnaire (see Miller et al. 2000 for an eloquent introduction). Although a quantitative survey indisputably would have given more room for causal inferences, my choice of method fell on qualitative in-depth interviews with previous DNV GL employees. This study is characterized by an exploratory approach, attempting to (further) develop theory from empirical data. Thus, I was interested in thoughts, interpretations, and meanings concerning the process and nature of multiple identifications in an organizational setting, and qualitative in-depth interviews were the most obvious choice of method. In this section, I will elaborate on the data material, the choice of method, and the analysis.

3.2 Previous DNV GL employees

I wanted to interview previous DNV GL employees mainly because I needed a common denominator in terms of identification. Following an established assumption that the process of identification occurs differently in different organizations (Johnson et al. 2006; Wallace 1995), a common denominator (i.e. employment in DNV GL) would allow for comparison. In addition, easy access to the field was also a decisive factor, as this thesis is written in cooperation with DNV GL.

I wanted to select the previous DNV GL employees at random, preferably picking names of a list based on a few selection criteria. First, the interviewees had to be engineers, because of the engineering focus. Secondly, they had to have left DNV GL voluntarily during the last ten years, and they had to still be in employment (i.e. not retired). Whether the end of employment in DNV GL were voluntary or not may have major impact on the post-employment relationship between employer and employee, and I wanted information about relationships not coloured by discharges or other negative circumstances. The reason why I wanted previous employees

resigned not more than ten years ago were mainly owing to the fact that memories diminish over time.

However, getting access to previous employees in DNV GL proved to be harder than initially assumed. Due to privacy protection issues, and because they could not differentiate between voluntary resigned and involuntary discharged employees, the employee register operators in DNV GL were unwilling to give contact information on previous employees. After a couple of weeks arguing back and forth, we found a way to bypass the issue of involuntary turnover by making a list of the previous employees that had responded to an exit interview; only voluntary resigned employees have the opportunity to participate in this interview. After removing the irrelevant job categories (such as “administrative”, “manage people”, etc.), the list consisted of 365 names, all resigned between 2007 and 2012. I then randomly chose two names (one male, one female) from each year of termination, resulting in a new list of ten names. The response from these ten was overwhelming. With only two unanswered phone calls and one person unwilling/unable, seven of the ten wanted to participate.

The randomness in the selection is neither to ensure generalizability (which, of course, is not a goal with qualitative research) nor to ensure an adequately vast span of meanings and interpretations (which would demand a far larger sample). Rather, I chose to select the respondents from the randomized list because I wanted to eliminate some distinct selection pitfalls associated with alternative selection methods, like snowballing or selection through social media. If I had applied the snowball method for recruiting respondents, there is a possibility that the snowball casters knowingly would have directed their snowballs towards previous employees with biased predispositions in relation to identification and affiliation with DNV GL. On a similar note, selection through social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, would arguably include previous employees with a particular disposition towards careers, organizational identities, etc., since LinkedIn is a networking platform, and exclude employees without this special interest. That being said, the chosen means of selection is far from entirely random, since all previous employees *not* participating in the exit interview are omitted. However, choosing from this “random” list of previous employees makes the process of selection more random than with the beforementioned alternative methods.

3.2.1 The respondents

The seven respondents, three female and four male, ranges from ages 32 to 54. They have a wide-ranging background, including, but not limited to, mechanical engineering, pipeline installation, and HSE management. Below, you will find a brief overview of the respondents' names², sex, age, education, and the number of previous employers.

Name	Sex	Age	Education	N. of prev. employers
Anna	F	40-45	MA Political Science	2
Bjørn	M	30-35	Chartered engineer	1
Christopher	M	50-55	Engineer	5
Dina	F	30-35	Chartered engineer	3
Erik	M	50-55	Chartered engineer	4
Fredrik	M	50-55	Chartered engineer	4
Gina	F	30-35	PhD Engineer	4

Figure 2. A brief overview of the respondents

Four out of six engineers were chartered engineers with five years or more of higher education, one had three years of engineering studies, while the last had a PhD degree in engineering. It is important to notice that Anna is not an engineer but a political scientist, something I became aware of in the interview. Nevertheless, Anna has spent several years in the company of engineers, and provided valuable insights in her interview regarding organizational identification in the engineering sector. While most of the respondents were working *as* engineers, two of them (in addition to Anna) did not have engineering as their current main occupational tasks: Gina, working with strategy and business development, and Christopher, stationed on a boat where engineering only constitutes one out of a number of different tasks. However, both Gina and Christopher have been working as engineers in the past.

3.3 Grounded theory in theory and practice

The methodological point of departure in this study is *grounded theory*, an inductive method introduced in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss (Charmaz 2001: 675; Glaser and Strauss 1967). While initially relying on an exploratory approach to the interviews, signifying that I intended to “make the road by walking”, I soon realized that I had to introduce some structure to the process of research and analysis. Being an inductive method, grounded theory allows for carefully

² For privacy protection, I have given the respondents new names.

assessing phenomena based on few observations (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 122), and the approach utilized in this thesis pursues this logic. In brief, the main component in grounded theory is the tight interconnectedness between data and analysis: in light of interviews already conducted, the researcher revise his/her data material and the interview guide before conducting subsequent interviews, in order to better specify and narrow down the research according to the topic question (Charmaz 2006: 15) . As Charmaz discerningly puts it:

In addition to picking up and pursuing themes in interviews, grounded theorists look for ideas by studying data and then returning to the field to gather focused data to answer analytic questions and to fill conceptual gaps. Thus the combination of flexibility and control inherent in in-depth interviewing techniques fits grounded theory strategies for increasing the analytic incisiveness of the resultant analysis (Charmaz 2001: 676)

As grounded theory is suitable for explaining social and psychological processes, it seemed adequate for investigating the process of identification and multiple simultaneous identification. It is, however, important to note that my research has not followed any strict recipe or principle. I have gather inspiration from several qualitative methods scholars, but the main inspiration has been modern contributors on the vast field of grounded theory.

At the beginning, my interview guide consisted of both questions based in theory and questions based on hypotheses deriving from my own personal intuition and experiences. After conducting the first interview, two mental processes occurred simultaneously: I started generating categories and codes, and I added and removed questions in the interview guide based on the answers in the preceding interview. Hence, the research process has been a continuous process of analysis and revising. Following Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009: 302) in grounded theory knowledge is a substance and the researcher is the miner trying to unearth the substance.

Many scholars have criticized grounded theory for being insensitive of the researcher's already existing theories and understandings, which influence the research from the beginning, while others emphasize that theorizing through grounded theory fall flat compared to the "empiricism present in the most wooden statistical studies" (Silverman 2013: 249). However, due to the exploratory nature of this study, as well as the lack of existing theories and literature on the field, grounded theory offer, in my opinion, an adequate method for shining light on concepts and categories related to multiple simultaneous identification.

3.3.1 Conceptual interviewing

In order to answer the topic questions, I conducted seven semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are characterized by “a sequence of themes to be covered, as well as some suggested questions” (Kvale 2007: 51). The interviews encompassed the three themes engineer or employee, organizational identification, and multiple simultaneous identification, and one of the main goals with the interviews was to investigate the interviewees’ notion of the three themes, i.e. a conceptual clarification (Kvale 2007: 71). Kvale (2007) states that

[t]he qualitative interview attempts to understand the world from the interviewee’s point of view, unfold the meaning in people’s experiences, uncover their lifeworld, before scientific explanations are employed (Kvale 1997: 15, my translation).

In other words, through interviews we can obtain personal and hands-on knowledge of the concepts and perceptions the interviewees’ apply to different aspects of their subjective worlds. Being both flexible and controllable, and due to the immediacy of data, Charmaz (2001: 676) argues that the in-depth interview suits grounded theory well. In my interviews, the advantages of semi-structured in-depth interviewing (and the benefits of follow-up questions) became particularly evident on occasions when the interviewee’s attention to the topic drifted, as well as on occasions when the interviewee misapprehended the question.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 141) emphasize that the staging of the interview is crucial for ensuring quality. During the interview, the respondent usually share sensitive and private information, and in order to share this kind of information, (s)he has to trust the interviewer. To ensure this trust, I opened the interviews with conversational talk, a brief introduction to the thesis and my role, as well as introductory questions where I asked the respondents to introduce himself or herself. The introductory questions allowed for a ‘slow start’ on the interview, before moving to the more cognitively demanding questions concerning identification.

All of the interviews took place at the respective respondent’s current workplace. According to Warren (2001: 90-91), the mere location of the interview may cause ripple effects throughout the interview process. On the one hand, the workplace is a place comfortable and familiarized for the respondents, ensuring a good setting for the interview and hence a potential for increased trust and openness. However, on a different note, the impressions and emotions related to your current workspace may bias your answers regarding feelings of identification and affiliation towards your current, and previous, employers. In the interviews, I experienced the former effect rather than the latter. The respondents answered frankly about their relationship with the

current employer. All of the interviews took place in closed rooms and hence the potential bias-effect presumably were subdued.

A semi-structured interview allows for a certain degree of comparison, but may also restrain the amount of information provided in the interview (Larsen 2007: 82). Thus, in order to gather rich enough data, what is more important than the structuring of the interview is the researcher's role. The concept of 'conscious naivety' suggests that the interviewer ought to be open to unexpected occurrences during the interview (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 50). Accordingly, Charmaz (2006: 15) argues that "[a] keen eye, open mind, discerning ear, and steady hand can bring you closer to what you study and are more important than developing methodological tools". An interview is, in the end, only a more or less formalized conversation between two (or more) individuals. The knowledge creation happens in the interplay between these two (or more) individuals and the knowledge is therefore not created in a vacuum (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 51). Both the interviewee and the interview may affect the quality and amount of data produced, aspects further elaborated below.

3.3.2 Categorization and coding

Larsen (2007: 98) posits that the analysis of meaning, as opposed to discourse analysis, account analysis, and conversation analysis, is the most common tool for analysis of qualitative data. Further, the analysis of meaning have two different points of departure. First, one can analyse the data in a holistic matter, attempting to grasp the interviewee's general meanings during the interviews, and later find statements and quotes supporting these meanings. Secondly, one can divide the interview into different parts or components, and analyse these through categorization (Larsen 2007: 99-100). The methodological point of departure here is grounded theory, and the interviews addressed a number of topics. Thus, my analysis strategy draws on the latter point of departure.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) differentiate between categorization and coding as means of analysing qualitative data material. Whereas coding involves tying key words to specific sections or parts of the transcribed interviews, in order to relocate the specific section or part later, categorization is a more systematic approach for tying statements to categories, allowing for a quantification of data (Kvale og Brinkmann 2009: 208-209). Although, according to the authors, the two concepts often are used interchangeably, coding is the central concept in grounded theory. The codes are used for anlaysis of the relationship between codes and the

relationship between codes, the context and the consequences of the interviewees' actions (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 209).

Following (2006), codes are the essential component in grounded theory, as “it shapes an analytic frame from which you build the analysis” (2006: 45-46). When coding, the researcher define the events and actions that takes place in the data, (s)he deveopls a further understanding of what it means, and generates ideas about how to conduct the further research (Charmaz 2006: 46). Accoridng to Charmaz, grounded theory coding follows two main phases. First, you have to name each words, sentences, or segments of the data, and, secondly, you sort and organize the most significant and frequent codes (Charmaz 2006: 46). In other words, coding is a process where you have to focus on what bein said in your data material, carefully apply codes to every relevant segment of the data, in order to later integrate and organize the codes for theorizing purposes. I used NVivo, a software desgined to facilitate the coding and anylzing process, to attach codes to the data material. After coding the interviews, I ended up with an elucidatory summary of the most important quotes and interpretations on the relevant topics.

3.4 Limitations

Numerous limitations and potential pitfalls is associated with conducting qualitative research. Larsen (2007: 104-105) summarize the potential sources of error in interviewing in three categories; the interview effect, the question effect, and the context effect. The *interview effect* occurs when the interviewer affects the respondent through reactions or behaviour (Larsen 2007: 104). The interviewer's mood may, for example influence the degree to which the respondent are willing to share information, and overt reactions may lead the respondent to alter his or her views and opinions. A *question effect* occurs when the answers, either consciously or unconsciously, are affected by question formulation (Larsen 2007: 105). One of the most prominent issues in this respect is the effect of leading questions. The way you formulate questions have vast impact on the way others answer them. However, as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 182-183) argue, leading questions may also function as a tool for the researcher, allowing for further investigation into topics the respondents are reluctant to share. The *context effect* involves the possibility that answers are influenced by previous questions, due to the ordering of the questions or formulations (Larsen 2007: 105). Larsen (2007: 105) suggests, however, that the context effect occurs more frequently in interviews with sensitive questions, indicating that the context effect is not prominent in this thesis.

3.4.1 Translation

Although the thesis is written in English, the interviews were conducted in Norwegian in order to ensure frankness and to avoid linguistic restraints. Another potential pitfall, then, take place in the translation from Norwegian to English. Norwegian and English are two rather different languages. Metaphors and allusions are often cultural-specific and therefore there is a potential for important meanings to get lost in translation. In addition, simple phrasings and idioms, and especially linguistic connectors such as “det går litt på det med”³, is difficult to translate into English. Two factors reduces the chance of severe translation errors. First, I was aware that the translation could cause problems and during translation I thus strived to keep as close as possible to the actual expressed opinions. Secondly, I have analysed the material in Norwegian and the data material was translated for educational purposes only, since the thesis is in English.

3.4.2 Objectivity

Possibly the most critical shortcoming is when the researcher superimpose their own concepts, terminologies, and *a priori* understandings upon the interviewee (Charmaz 2001: 681). Biased question formulations, wording, or even the order of the questions is likely to influence the interviewee, hence affecting the objectivity of the research. In other words, qualitative research is prone to *subjectivity* in all aspects of the research process. For example, follow-up questions, and therefore on what parts of the respondent’s answers attention will be given, is determined by the interviewer. Moreover, when coding, the *researcher* creates the codes. (S)he actively label events and actions in the data based on his or her own views, no matter how close the codes are to the empirical reality (if such a thing exists) (Charmaz 2006: 47).

One of the best remedies for avoiding subjectivity in the research process is awareness. When conducting the interviews, I consistently had in mind the abovementioned discussion. In addition, analysing by means of grounded theory are intended to reduce the potential for subjectivity by maintaining the close connectedness between the empirical evidence and the analytical questions.

³ I chose to translate it into “it has something to do with..”

3.4.3 Generalizability

An established critique of qualitative research is the lack of representativeness and the ensuing inability of generalizability. However, as Kvale (1997: 109) argues, if the goal is to produce general knowledge, intensive case studies often suffice. There are, for example, several ground-breaking studies focusing only on a limited amount of respondents, and, in fact, “the most important studies in qualitative research, which produced significant theories, were based on non-probability samples” (Gobo 2004: 412).

The critique is rooted in an understanding that qualitative research lack *representativeness* and *probability samples* (Gobo 2004: 405), factors present in quantitative methods. However, as Gobo argues, there are two kinds of generalizations. The first kind is the generalization about a specific population or group, based on representativeness and probabilities. The second kind of generalization is the “generalization about the *nature of a process*” (Gobo 2004: 405). The latter kind rest on theoretical sampling rather than a statistical sampling, as in the former. However, Gobo goes further to answer the question of generalizability in qualitative research, by arguing that one ought to direct the focus to the *pervasiveness* of the phenomenon in question:

This implies thinking through whether the social phenomenon under study is pervasive. In other words, we may expect there are not *significant* differences between the population and the sample. For this reason a few cases, mirroring a pervasive phenomenon in society, may be enough if its population is quite homogeneous (Gobo 2004: 415)

As previously noted, the previous employees of DNV GL may as well be pervasive representatives of the general Norwegian engineer, especially because all of them have worked for multiple employers. Whether there are significant differences between the respondents and the population is hard to assess, but given the idea that most engineers are socialized into a homogeneous ‘engineering mind-set’ (Becker and Carper 1956a; Anderson et al. 2010), and due to the exploratory nature of the thesis, the pervasive sample here suffices for studying general sentiments and interpretations concerning multiple identification processes in the engineering sector. In addition, arguably, DNV GL represents a typical engineering company in Norway, which suggests that previous DNV GL employees represent an *average emblematic* case (Gobo 2004: 419). An average emblematic case is a sampling strategy where you study the typical, and the sample addresses features related to what is typical for the phenomenon within where the case is a part. Moreover, in qualitative research researchers are attempting to make general observations concerning “the conditions under which our phenomena exists, the

action/interaction that pertains to them, and the associated outcomes and consequences” (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 191, quoted in Gobo 2004: 421). It is, in other words, the processes of social phenomenon we are interested in, as well as describing the *variables* rather than describing a population (Gobo 2004: 423).

3.5 Ethical considerations

The researcher has to consider several ethical and moral questions. Ethical issues is especially prevalent in qualitative research, due to the complexity concerning “examining the private life of individuals, and make the observations publicly available” (Birch et al. 2002:1, quoted in Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 80. My translation). In the following, I will address some of the ethical consideration associated with interviewing and qualitative analysis.

3.5.1 Informed consent

According to the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD), in order for the participation in a research project to be valid, it has to be voluntary, expressed, and informed.⁴ Thus, before conducting each interview, the respondents had to sign a written informed consent form, with information about the research project, who would have access to the data, what would happen to the data after finalization, and insurance regarding voluntariness, anonymity and confidentiality. You will find the informed consent form as an appendix to this thesis. As a matter of form, this thesis is registered and approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD).

3.5.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality means that no data that either directly or indirectly identify the respondents are revealed (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 90). To ensure the confidentiality, I processed the data in two ways. First, I have depersonalized both the respondents’ names and the names of current and previous employers (except for DNV GL), because information about their current and previous employers certainly could have identified them. I also anonymized or left out distinct features or descriptions that potentially could have identified the employer. Secondly, I have deleted the recordings from the recording device and placed the mp3-files and the list of names

⁴ <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/samtykke.html>

in a password-protected file on my personal computer. In line with the informed consent, these files will be deleted right after the project's deadline.

It is, however, not mandatory to anonymize the data. In the interviews, the respondents were asked for opinions and thoughts about their feelings of affiliation and identification toward current and previous employees, *inter alia*. I chose to anonymize the data in order for the respondents to speak freely. The information given were oftentimes potentially compromising, and if I could not guarantee for their privacy, the respondents may have withheld information.

3.5.3 The researcher's role

There is a tension between scientific research and the ethical responsibility of the researcher. While the researcher strive to acquire profound, in-depth data on one hand, (s)he simultaneously have to respect the respondents personality, privacy, and integrity on the other hand. This scientific dilemma has no definite solution, but is subject to the researcher's ethical discernment (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 184 - 185). In my interviews, the topics were of limited sensitivity, though some sensible topics arose. When encountering sensitive topics, ranging from unpleasant reasons for job resignation to an inadequate organization of the respondent's work-life balance, I chose not to pursue the topic any further since these topics were outside of this thesis' scope.

3.6 Summary

Inspired by grounded theory, the thesis utilizes seven semi-structured in-depth interviews with former DNV GL employees. The method was chosen due to an interest in meanings and interpretations concerning the fundamental processes constituting multiple identification in the engineering sector. By transcribing and coding the interviews, I were able to situate different answers and phrases into categories, which in turn allowed for carefully analysing the data. In this section, I have also pinpointed several limitations and potential pitfalls associated with conducting qualitative interviewing, and I have elaborated how I have coped with these limitations. Qualitative research is especially prone to the researcher's subjective opinions and interpretations, and awareness of the potential pitfalls is an essential part of conducting interviews and analysis.

4 Analysis: Multiple identification to professions and organizations

For palpable reasons, my seven respondents were not unison in their contemplations. On certain topics they were rather disperse, while being more united on other topics. In the following section, I will elaborate on the findings in the interviews and attempt to answer the topic questions. For educational purposes, I reiterate the topic questions here:

What constitutes the nature of multiple simultaneous identifications in the engineering sector?

a. How does the identification process unfold for an engineer changing jobs?

b. What is the relationship between an engineer's professional identification and organizational identification?

I will commence the following discussion by elaborating on the process of identification in an organizational setting as the respondents elucidate it. Thereafter, I will investigate the relationship between the respondent's professional identification and organizational identification, before finally adding it up and discussing the findings in light of multiple simultaneous identifications.

4.1 Engineers and identification in an organizational context

4.1.1 Why identification with what?

Several different aspects with a social entity may induce identification. When identifying in an organizational context, the engineer may turn to the organizational identity, his or her co-workers, the occupation, the work group, and the products or services offered by the organization, inter alia (Scott 1997: 496). Ashforth and Johnson (2001: 32) distinguishes between lower order identities (i.e. your job, colleagues, workgroup, etc.) and higher order identities (organization, division, etc.), and as identities and identification are tightly interconnected, organizational members may identify with the different orders in an organization.

Lower order organizational identification: Tasks and colleagues

For many of the engineers I interviewed, including Bjørn, identification with the organization *as a whole* (i.e. the higher order of the organization) was of less importance:

BJØRN: No, that I don't give a shit about. Well, the most important is my two closest superiors and the rest may fiddle about. I have to admit that when we have these monthly meetings where they present organizational changes and things like that, I kind of close my doors a bit and think "well well, my desk is here and my boss is there, that will suffice".

Bjørn offers a rather stern outlook on organizational identification. For him, his closest colleagues and the job itself are the key elements of affiliation and identification in organizations. In the hierarchy of possible targets of identifications, then, Bjørn feels more attached to the lower levels of the organization. Although not as discordant, most of the engineers share Bjørn's view:

CHRISTOPHER: [...] because, you see, it's the people who *is* the company. Therefore [the organization] doesn't mean as much as the people that surrounds you. They create the environment in the company.

DINA: It is not the company, then. Inasmuch. Because it can be independent. No, it is both and. The people and the tasks.

ERIK: No, well, again, you don't get very attached to the company, in my opinion. You become more attached to the people who work there, right, and the projects you have worked in and the products you have worked on, and so on.

The emphasis, then, is both ascribed the *people* in the organization, and the *tasks* you perform as an engineer. In this view, put bluntly, the employing organization only serve as a frame within where you and your co-worker perform engineering tasks. For instance, when asked for reasons why they left DNV⁵, several of the respondents pinpointed monotonous work and absence of exciting tasks as one of the decisive factors. As Christopher puts it, "[...] in DNV, you work within very defined frames and there is not enough headroom for, as Trond Viggo Torgersen⁶ says, 'think by yourself'". Seemingly, the engineering tasks are both the target of identification and at the same time a potential pretext to leave. However, *why* do many of the

⁵ Throughout the thesis, I will use 'DNV', 'DNV GL', and 'Veritas' interchangeably. This is because the company just recently changed their name to DNV GL and the discussion with the respondents often used 'DNV' (the company name at the time of their employment) and 'Veritas' (the informal way of speaking of the company)

⁶ Famous norwegian doctor/artist/media man

engineers apparently identify more strongly with the tasks and their co-workers than the organization in which they work?

Some of the respondents emphasize that the actual tasks they conduct *by virtue of being engineers* exceeds the importance of attachment and belongingness in the organization. This has, among other things, to do with the cooperative nature of the tasks conducted. Erik, for example, put great importance in the fact “that you develop something and do something together with your colleagues, and create something together“, which invokes a feeling of identification with your colleagues. DNV GL organizes, as do most engineering companies, their work in project teams, where the engineers work conjointly in order to complete one or a few projects at the time. The high loyalty and identification to one’s respective team and the immediate colleagues in an organizational setting was also demonstrated in Barker and Tomkins’ (1994) study of the dual targets of identification in a US based communication company. By combining the OIQ (Organizational Identification Questionnaire) and an ethnographic study, the authors found that in companies who organize the work in self-managing teams, the employees exhibit a greater loyalty and identification to their teams than to the larger organization (Barker and Tomkins 1994: 233). Thus, the fact that the respondents exhibit a greater loyalty to their colleagues and tasks may have to do with how the work is organized within the organization. Studying the engineering work and the engineering identity, Anderson et al. (2010: 166-167) found that one central element of the engineering identity is the categorization of themselves as team-players. Hence, the lower order identification will be stronger because it is a central part of your social identity as an engineer.

Higher order organizational identification: vision and identity

The sentiment that the engineers primarily identify with the tasks and people in the organization and not the organization as a whole is not, however, unison. Some of the engineers put greater accent on the values and vision, and especially when elaborating on their employment in DNV GL. Fredrik remembers a survey conducted when he was working in the company mapping important factors in the psychosocial work environment:

FREDRIK: [...] and vision and values scored very high on the list, if not on top. And I remember I also thought that it was important. It is important for identity and important for your loyalty that you work in a company you believe in and are proud of, and that has a lot to do with the vision.

Before discussing these matters further, it is necessary to elaborate on DNV GL as a company. At least two aspects are important for understanding what is distinctive about DNV GL for an engineer. First, DNV GL places huge emphasis on their vision and values in all of their businesses, arguably significantly more than other companies do in the Norwegian engineering sector⁷. All new employees in DNV GL have to participate in an onboarding program, where they are thoroughly educated in the vision and values in DNV GL. Secondly, the company is a foundation where most of the revenue are re-invested in the company⁸. The absence of shareholders will arguably generate an enhanced focus on the values, as opposed to a focus on return of investment for the shareholders. In other words, when the shareholder value-focus is absent, the values will presumably be more salient.

Accordingly, some of the engineers emphasize the nature and mission of the organization as important for organizational identification. However, most mention values and mission in relation to DNV GL, but not so often in relation to other companies. When asked whether the target of identification has been different across organizational settings, Bjørn replies that he felt more connected to the values in DNV GL than he does in his current employing organization. He especially emphasizes the efforts DNV GL puts on inclusion and onboarding – the “‘We in DNV’-philosophy” as he calls it. Gina refer to the consistent communication of the values from the management as important:

GINA: [...] for me, it is more about what values that lies in the company. And how it is communicated from the management, and how the management promote it outwards. Here, I believe Veritas does a very fine job. There, I experience that the values are a strong part of the company culture.

Similarly, the nature of DNV GL's businesses was important for some of the respondents.

CHRISTOPHER: And the fact that they work with many future-oriented things, both in relation to the environment and things like that. So of course it is positive. I think so. But no, it was not enough for me to stay, after all.

Christopher has a cheerful and optimistic attitude towards both the work aspect of his life and his spare time, and he chose his current employer largely based on idealistic reasons and he accentuates that the job is meaningful. Relatedly, some sentiment can be found in the interviews that organizational values, i.e. the higher order of the organization, becomes more important as

⁷ The large focus on vision and values was reverberated by most of the respondents. In addition, after being involved in the company for approximately one and a half year now, I experience that it is actually a general sentiment among DNV GL-employees that they maintain a strong and good focus on their vision and values

⁸ After the 2013/14 merger, DNV GL became a partly owned limited company.

one get older. In other words, seniority induces a greater potential for organizational identification. Christopher, for instance, maintains that the value-of-work-focus has increased with age. Gina also reported a change in focus when I asked her whether the company values was decisive when applying for the job in DNV:

GINA: No, but it is a reason why I could consider them again. And that, I believe, has something to do with age and maturity, and personal development- that values are even more important for me now that it was five or ten years ago.

Thus, temporal aspects have an apparent influence on what targets of identification the individual give prominence. Accordingly, some of the respondents suggested that identification with the higher order of the organization becomes more prominent with tenure. Hence, employees with longer tenure presumably identify stronger with the higher order organization than the lower order, and low tenure employees will do the opposite. I will investigate this further in the next section.

Discussion

Why do some of the engineers identify almost solely with the lower order of the organization while other still maintain some degree of identification with the higher order? Seemingly, it is to some extent determined by *salience* and *tenure*.

Ashforth and Johnson, when discussing lower and higher order identities, maintains that the former is usually more salient than the latter, because lower order identities in general are “more subjectively important and situationally relevant” (Ashforth and Johnson 2001: 35). In other words, the ‘local’, closer to the individual, identities evoke a stronger identification because such identities and identification are more cognitively important for the individual. The higher order identification is more abstract and harder to actually understand and cognitively process, thus given less prominence. In addition, in a job situation, the employee find herself more often in situations where she categorize herself in comparison with other colleagues, project groups, and sections, and therefore the lower order identification is more salient (Pratt 1998: 191). As Ashforth and Johnson puts it:

[...] because organizational members have the organizational identity in common, it becomes the water within which they all swim, and therefore less salient than more localized identities (Ashforth and Johnson 2001: 35)

Accordingly, as one of the respondents also suggested, the identification is stronger in smaller organizations than in larger. In smaller organizations, there is a far smaller gap between the lower order identities and the higher order identities, resulting in a juxtaposing of the two identities. The organizational identity in such holographic organizations becomes, in other words, more or less equivalent to the identities of the department and colleagues and job (Albert and Whetten 1985).

Another factor decisive for organizational identification is tenure, i.e. how long you have been working in the organization. For example, Barker and Tomkins (1994: 232-233) found significant empirical evidence showing that long-tenured employees felt more strongly identified with both the lower order (the team) and the higher order (the company) of the organization than did short-tenured and mid-tenured employees. This is also reverberated in the interviews. Both Bjørn and Dina started their careers with an extended period in DNV, and both maintained a significantly strong identification with the company. Erik only worked in DNV for approximately two and a half years, and therefore, according to him, he felt less attached to DNV than to, for example, company T, in which he worked for 10 years after graduating.

Relatedly, Gina emphasize another aspect associated with time that are decisive for identification, namely average time invested in the company on a daily basis. After working in DNV for around two and a half years followed a period in a consultancy company where she worked for three years. In DNV, the average hours per week was around 40, while she had to work almost 60 hours a week in the consultancy company. Of the identification in the latter, she told me this:

GINA: Yes, it is a very strong attachment- they create a very strong attachment. You need that in order to work 60 hours a week. But in that regard, I think Veritas does a great job creating a strong attachment compared to, let's say, how little time they have at their disposal. On 40 hours a week, compared to those who have 60 hours a week and quite different budgets. They are good at communicating their values, and that they have a clear outwards leader.

This argument, though, suffers a slight problem with causality. Is the organizational identification strong because the employees have to work 60 hours a week or do they accept the 60-hour weeks because of a strong organizational identification? In the quote above, Gina is rather ambiguous, stating both that a very strong attachment is essential in order to 60 hours a week and that the 60-hour week (and high budgets) create the strong identification. Perhaps there is no clear answer to this chicken-and-egg-problem. At least I found little distinct evidence

for either causality directions in my data material. Maybe, and perhaps most likely, the causality here is actually circular: a strong organizational identification ensures a high level of commitment among the employees, while at the same time, a high level of commitment among the employees enhances a strong organizational identification.

In general, the respondents often exhibited both uncertainty and ambiguity concerning their primary target of attachment and identification. Some actually changed their mind over the course of the interview, initially reporting a prominent organizational identification, while later concluding that they felt more identified as an engineer than employee. For instance, an interesting situation occurred when I asked Fredrik why he chose to apply for a job in DNV in the first place. After first accentuating both the professionalism exhibited by DNV and the fact that he already had a network in the organization, I asked him how important the values was for him:

I: What about the organization? You say it is a professional organization, but what about the values?

FREDRIK: Very important.

I: For applying for a job in DNV?

FREDRIK: Maybe not as much as- because when I started, I didn't know them as well as I did after working there a while and saw what kind of people that worked there and got to know people.

Here, Fredrik answers a question about values with a further discussion about the people in the organization. It seems, then, and not only for Fredrik, that the respondents have some difficulties with separating the higher and lower orders of organizational identification. The ambiguity may exist because 'organizational identity' and 'organizational identification' are abstract concepts, relatively distanced from the respondents' everyday frames of references. Another explanation may be that organizations are complex social systems that cannot be assessed without reference to the employees and businesses (tasks).

4.1.2 Replacing or prevailing identifications

So what happens to the organizational identification after the end of employment? Does it prevail? Alternatively, is it immediately replaced by a new organizational identification? Moreover, if so, how long does this process take? In my data material, I found some thoughts

and experiences concerning what happens to the organizational identification when changing job.

One apparent crucial element when it comes to how the process of identification occur during job change is *time*. Dina stayed in DNV GL for more than eight years, starting in the company newly graduated, and time was an important factor for her in terms of identification. When she resigned, she told me, it felt like a divorce. This has a lot to do with the vast network she had developed over the course of eight years in the company, in combination with a certain fear of the unknown future. Additionally, among other things, she stressed how important the professional development and training she got in DNV GL was for the feeling of a strong organizational identification. Other respondents, such as Bjørn and Erik, also emphasized this importance of training and professional development. Since she started in the company newly graduated, Dina got practically all of her initial work experience and training here, and when I asked her how the identification processes came about in M, her current employer, she claimed it took a while:

DINA: It has taken some time indeed. We have started to become imprinted with, you know, the values here. So I am starting to get more like “yeah, no, now I work in M”, you know. Now, I am an M-person and not a DNV-person, as I have felt like for a while. It has, for that matter, taken a year plus before you manage to turn about. Almost two years.

As discussed previously, tenure and time is a decisive factor for organizational identification in general. Thus, in most instances, your tenure in the previous organization is essential for the identification process in the new organization. Long-tenured employees will probably maintain some degree of identification with the previous employee for an extended period of time, and therefore the process of identification with the new employer are likely to be lengthier, whereas short-tenured employees adapt to, and identify with, the new organization quicker and losing the “old” identification faster. Gina argues correspondingly:

GINA: I believe it depends on what you have built/developed⁹. But when I changed employer it did take some months, almost half a year, before I felt stronger attachment to new employer than to the old employer.

Many other factors also influence the identification process when changing job. Many of the respondents deemed that *prolonged contact* with previous colleagues, both through informal connections and formal work related connections, would increase and protract the feeling of

⁹ In Norwegian: “bygget opp”. A figurative reference to what you have invested and how much social, material, and symbolic value you have accumulated in a company

identification with the previous organization. If you maintain contact with the previous company through your job or through social relations, identification to the previous organization will become cognitively salient. Christopher emphasized both the informal and the formal aspects when I asked whether the DNV-identification diminished swiftly after end of employment.

CHRISTOPHER: Well, no, like I said, as long as you work within shipping you will always have a connection to Veritas. And I had many good colleagues there, and several of these colleagues- you know, I talk with them almost on a weekly basis, and still, when I am home, I intend to travel to Høvik to visit.

Christopher maintains that his time in DNV GL has made his everyday working life easier afterwards, because he got acquainted with “a lot of people, and a lot of skilled people” which he can utilize. Bjørn also has a good post-employment relationship to DNV GL, and he is, to a bigger extent than many of the other respondents, using his attachment to the company for instrumental purposes.

BJØRN: [...] I still talk with Veritas about where I currently work some times, so the connection is still there, absolutely. I have regular contact with old colleagues, both socially and in job contexts.

Nevertheless, for others such as Fredrik, the relationship with the previous organizations are less prominent:

I: What happens to the attachment when you quit? Is it replaced by the new employer, or what happens?

FREDRIK: Yes, actually quite instantly. I feel it takes quite a while before I say “we” about the company I work in. It is not day 1.

I: So, it takes a while to adapt to the new?

FREDRIK: Yes, at least in terms of identity. It takes a long time for me at least. That, I have noticed.

I: But what about losing the old?

FREDRIK: No, well, it is not so much the company, but more that you miss your colleagues, for instance. Because you get good friends while you’re there, and they are gone very fast for me. I’m not good at keeping in touch with previous colleagues.

Apparently, Fredrik loses the organizational identification rather fast after end of employment, but still claims it takes some time before he use “we” about his new employer. The reason for this may have to do with which targets of identification that is the most important for him. For Fredrik, and some others of the respondents, a prerequisite for feeling identified with an

organization was that you had to have contributed to something. In other words, before you have partaken in a project or teamwork it is almost as if you have not “earned the right” to label yourself an employee.

Some of the respondents held that the identification process in a job transition period is not a one-to-one process. Dina, when asked whether the new organizational identification replaces the old organizational identification, maintained that

[i]n many ways, it does, but in a different way, it is not a one-to-one replacement, because you get a completely different environment. But that doesn't mean the grass isn't greener on the other side. It is like, you bring with you what you got from DNV, and that attachment I've still got. But I notice that as the years go by, it will be more and more replaced by the M-attachment.

Dina refers to the transition between DNV GL and company M, her current employer. An interesting observation is that she accentuates the environmental differences in the two companies as important for the identification process. The two companies, although both in the oil and gas sector, is operating in two different areas in the production chain. In addition, they are different in their fundamental nature, where DNV GL is a foundation whereas M is a private limited company, implicating a more financial market orientation in the latter. While not being distinctly spelled out, according to Dina, these differences in company nature and businesses makes the transitional identification process potentially easier. Several of the respondents, for instance, maintained that changing jobs between two rivalling companies would make the identification process more problematic, especially in terms of cognitive factors such as loyalty.

Anna contemplates on the transitional identification process metaphorically, by comparing her different organizational identifications with a house (O is the previous employer before DNV GL and L is her current employer):

ANNA: It doesn't replace maybe, only opens up a new room. You see, you sort of acquire more rooms. I wouldn't say that I have- it is not to supplantation for anything, but it turns paler, right. The O-room turns paler and the DNV-room turns paler in my mentality, and I acquire another room. I can just open up another door, I think, and that is the L-door. And I haven't closed the DNV-door or the O-door, but I don't go through them, or into the rooms, that often anymore. But they are always with me and have shaped me, the attachments. They are with me and, like, a part of me.

According to Anna, the identification with the previous employer do not completely disappears, but linger on as a part of your social identity. Anna's metaphor again brings us back to the issue of identification salience. Taken a couple of steps further, the rooms represent social categories

available for the inhabitant. The inhabitant can walk freely through doors and between rooms, but they are prone to choose some rooms over others. Moreover, the metaphor illustrates the dynamic nature of organizational identification, where the individual may choose, both consciously and unconsciously, between different identifications. On a similar note, Elsbach (1998) suggests a stellar constellation metaphor for describing the nature of social identification. Every star in the stellar constellation (like Orion or Cassiopeia) represent an available identification. These stars, or identifications, add up to the individual's social identity, whereas far away stars are not included, since they represent social groups with which the individual do not identify, or even disidentify¹⁰. Furthermore, the stellar constellation changes over time and location, implying that the same happens to the social identification (Elsbach 1998: 236). Different social groups gain salience over others at certain times, situations, and places.

Metaphors such as Anna's identification house and Elsbach's stellar constellations give room for a better understanding of the phenomenon, but cannot alone account for the complex and multifaceted concept of organizational identification in times of job change. Therefore, in the following, I will present a model for different scenarios of what happens with the organizational identification when an individual changes job.

4.1.3 A model of transitional identifications in an organizational context

Based on the observations in the interviews, one may hypothesize four different scenarios about what happens with the organizational identification when an individual changes job. The first possible scenario can be labelled (1) *replacement*. Here, the organizational identification with the previous employer are replaced by the organizational identification with the new employer relatively instantaneously after the end of employment. The employee incorporates the new employer's beliefs and identity into his or her own self-concept, while the identification with the previous employer diminishes relatively fast. The second possibility, what may be called (2) *concurring continuation*, occurs when the employee hold on to the identification with the previous employer, while simultaneously gaining an increased identification with the new.

¹⁰ To not identify and disidentify are two different concepts, where the latter represent a process where the individual actively distance herself from the social group. Due to scope and place limits in this thesis, I have chosen to drop the discussion on disidentification here. For an illuminating introduction, see for example Dukerich, Kramer, and Parks (1998)

Here, the “old” identification does not diminish instantaneously but continue to act concurrently with the new as a self-referential and self-defining mechanism for the employee.

The third hypothetical scenario may be labelled (3) *recurring continuation*. In this scenario, the employer hold on to the organizational identification with the previous employer while not adhering to the identification of the new employer. Finally, there may arise a situation where the employee identify with neither the previous nor the new employer, a scenario called (4) *no identification*, loosely inspired by Kreiner and Ashforth’s (2004: 4-5) notion of *neutral identification*. This scenario may occur in situation where other targets of identifications than the organizations are of key importance for the employee, such as professional identification or identification with friends and family. Inserting these four scenarios in a coordination system, where the X-axis represent the degree of identification with the new employer and the Y-axis represent the degree of identification with the previous employer, illustrates the differences.

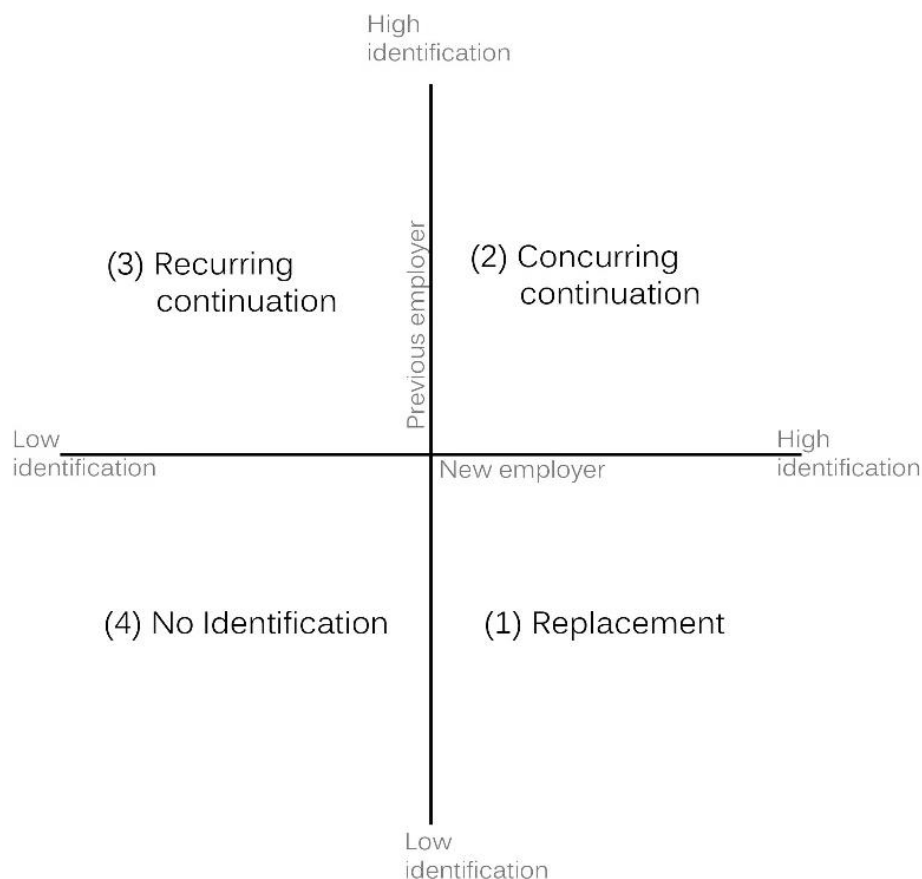


Figure 3. A hypothetical model of transitional identifications in an organizational context

The identification process in the transition period between two jobs/organizations does not happen in a vacuum. Thus, the axes in the model represent a continuum, and the individuals

may find themselves anywhere in the model at any given time. Additionally, the model is time-independent, suggesting that the individual's identification with the 'old' and 'new' organizations will necessarily change over time. An employee's identification with the previous employer may initially be strong, representing a concurring continuation of the identification, and then slowly diminish over time, resulting in an identification replacement. In the model the employee will then 'move' from square 2 towards square 1. Without ascribing meaning to the respondents and placing them in rigorous categories, it is possible to carefully extract some tendencies in the respondents' answers concerning what happened to the organizational identification with DNV after resigning. Apparently, Anna, Erik and Fredrik reported that the identification with DNV diminished rather fast after end of employment, hence reporting an (1) identification replacement, whereas Christopher and Gina claimed to maintain an identification with both old and new employer for some time, i.e. a (2) concurring continuation of the identifications. Dina, although rather ambiguous in her answers, also tended to find herself in this scenario. Only Bjørn reported to maintain a stronger identification with DNV with his new employer, thus maintaining a (3) recurring continuation of the old identification. None of the respondents reported to have (4) no identification at all with the old or new organization, but given that individuals have a multitude of targets to identify with other than the organization, it is nevertheless a possibility.

It is important to note that the model represent ideal typical scenarios and that it is far from all-embracing. As I have emphasized on several occasions, the process of organizational identification is not simple and unison, but rather a complex and nonlinear (Ashforth and Johnson 2001). Three important limitations are present. First, the temporal dimension is absent. As organizational identification changes over time, individuals can find themselves at different places in the model dependent on how long time since the job transition. Secondly, social identification are associated with all levels of an organization (Johnson et al. 2006: 498), whereas the model only allows for comparison of the identification across two targets on the same abstraction level (such as two nations, two different sections, two friendship groups, and so on) and not across abstraction levels (such as organization-work group, organization-profession, etc.). Additionally, it is yet only compatible with the comparison of dual identifications and not comparisons of identification with three or more social entities. Finally, I does not account for *why* the identification is replaced or continue, nor does it consider the possible consequences of the different scenarios. In other words, as of now the model is still preliminary and demands further development.

4.1.4 Summary

Although a vast dispersal in opinion and thought among my respondents, in this section I have pinpointed some of the strongest and most important sentiments reported by the engineers on the nature of organizational identification. I started by identifying what abstraction levels in an organization the engineers gave prominence in terms of identification. The interviews gave evidence that most of the engineers felt more identified with their tasks and colleagues, i.e. the most proximal targets of identification, than with their employing organization. Reasons for this varied, but one explanation may be that engineers conduct engineering tasks together with other engineers, thus construing a strong and durable identification with their profession. In self-categorization terms, this suggests that the engineers incorporate the engineering category as a part of their social identity, because the engineering category is both cognitively proximal and subjectively important for the individual. Another reason may be the physical organization of the work. The engineers often work in more or less self-managing teams, and studies have shown that this type of organizing induces a lower order organization (Barker and Tomkins 1994). Seemingly, identification with the higher order of the organization may also become salient at certain times. The respondents indicated that higher order identification were more present in DNV GL than in other organizations, which may be because DNV GL is a foundation with a persuasive focus on values and vision in all of their businesses. Some of the respondents also accentuated temporal aspects, such as age and tenure as being relevant determinants for identifying with the higher order of an organization.

I have also elaborated on what happens with the organizational identification when leaving an organization and when changing job. Here, the respondents were more divided in their opinions. Some argued that they have a good relationship with their previous employees, whereas others have little or no relationship whatsoever. Here, temporal aspects is even more pivotal. When leaving an organization, especially if no ties are maintained, the identification with that organization are likely to diminish. However, if the previous employee maintain some form of contact, either formally through job relations, or informally through his or her private network, the identification will likely to continue.

4.2 Professional versus organizational identification

One of the major findings in the interviews was a sentiment among the engineers that the professional identification have precedence over the organizational identification. In this section, I will elaborate more on this. In the interview, I asked for thoughts on both determinants and causes for high professional identification, and the consequences and effects of high professional identification on organizational identification.

4.2.1 Cause...

Most of the engineers stated that they identified more strongly with the profession than their current employing organization, and the few who initially hesitated or claimed to feel more connected to the organization changed their mind over the course of the interview. From the respondents' answers, one can identify at least three main causes for the high professional identification: (1) the labour market situation in the engineering sector, (2) a persistent focus on products and tasks, and (3) a strong professional socialization.

The last decade, the (1) labour market situation for engineers has been burgeoning. As Bjørn honestly and bluntly stated, "it is like the employee have the upper hand, and the employer have to lay flat as a pancake and receive and hope for the best". The phenomenon has been thoroughly covered in media (see Aale and Bjørnstad 2011; Olsen 2011; Sved 2012a; b, inter alia), and the debate is still active (Sjøberg 2014a, b). Gouldner emphasized the generalist nature of their expert education as essential for the engineers labour market situation :

[...] because of their intensive technical training, experts have greater opportunities for horizontal job mobility and can fill jobs in many different organizations. As E. C. Hughes would say, they are more likely to be "itinerants.." Consequently, experts are less likely to be committed to their employing organization than to their specialty (Gouldner 1957: 288)

Engineers, then, have an education that is highly valued in the labour market, which enables them to become 'itinerants' with a high level of horizontal job mobility. This notion of mobility may substitute one of the fundamental drivers of organizational identification: the need for psychological and physical safety (Pratt 1998: 181). The mobility reduces the need for organizational identification and thus evokes the salience of other identifications, such as the professional identification. However, this explanation only accounts for one of the four fundamental reasons why people identify with organizations presented by Pratt (1998: 181-183). How does the labour market flexibility for engineers substitute for holistic needs, needs

for self-enhancement, and affiliation needs? More explanatory factors have to be included in the equation.

The respondents put stronger emphasis on (2) the nature of the tasks and products for explaining the strong identification to the engineering profession. Engineers are, as Fredrik puts it, often more “nerdy” than employees with other backgrounds, and thus they are likely to give more attention to their job and concrete tasks than their surroundings. Fredrik elaborates on his time in a shipping company (K), where the tasks and product were an important target of identification:

FREDRIK: [when] I think about the time I was in K, for example, I think about how cool it was to build something that awesome. To build a city for 5000 people that is high tech, you know. All the latest within technology. If you can find anything newer, you take it, always.

Fredrik subsequently emphasize that when you work within shipping, the products and people are the most important targets of identification mainly because of the often adverse nature of the companies’ businesses. Their goals and visions are likely to be primarily profit-related, and thus, as he expresses, “if you haven’t got the nerdy angle on it, you do nothing else than destroying the world”. By identifying with activities and products associated with their profession, the engineers avoid the unfavourable nature of the employer’s businesses. This, however, is arguably a characteristic of the shipping industry. Other branches of the maritime (and engineering in general) industry may be different.

Another aspect some of the engineers accounted for was the conjoining nature of the engineering tasks. Following SCT, doing engineering tasks together with other engineers will enhance the salience of the engineering category. At the most basic level, the group members will assess their level of fit in the group in relation to the other group members, a *comparative fit*, and contrast their (in)group’s qualities and activities to those of outgroup’s (Pratt 1998: 194-195). A group consisting of engineers is likely to be ascribed categories related to engineering (technical training, high level of expertise, etc.), a *normative fit*, and this will in turn evoke a strong identification with the profession (Pratt 1998: 195). Relatedly, in their study of six engineering firms, (Anderson et al. 2010: 166) illustrated the engineering identity with the following equation:

Problem solver + team player + life-long learner = Engineer

Perhaps slightly condensed, this equation illustrates what the authors' found to be the key characteristics the engineers ascribed to what it means to be an engineer, i.e. the engineering identity. Given that the three attributes comprises the engineering identity, and that they all are associated with proximal work-related activities, it indicates that engineers are more interested in their profession than organizational aspects. Similarly, Gouldner distinguishes engineers as experts as opposed to 'company men'. Experts have a long, technical training that have generates certain skills which may seem abstract and, in Gouldner's terms, 'mysterious' for people not acquainted with the profession. (Gouldner 1957: 290):

Experts are less likely to be identified [as 'loyal'] in part beause their relatively complex, seemingly mysterious skills, derived from long formal training, lead them to make more basic commitment to their job than to the organization in which they work (Gouldner 1957: 288).

The last major aspect the respondents emphasized was (3) socialization. This aspect, however, seems to have a dualistic dimension. Some of the engineers accentuated a strong and long professional socialization as fundamental for an enduring professional identification, while others argued that a perpetual socialization in an organization would shift the main identification from a professional to an organizational. I will discuss these arguments in turn.

In their study of students of physiology, philosophy, and mechanical engineering, Becker and Carper's (1956b, a) found that it is through certain socialization mechanisms, "made up of changes in participation in organized groups and transformations of various aspects of the self-image, that occupational identifications develop and change" (Becker and Carper 1956a: 298), and these mechanisms differs across fields of study. The engineers decide relatively early their future occupation (engineering students will, in most cases, become engineers), which, in addition to the college experience and, perhaps, industry experiences, induces a strong and resilient identification with the profession (Becker and Carper 1956a: 293). Both Dina and Gina emphasize the years at college as important for their professional identification. Gina, the only respondent with a doctorate, stayed at NTNU¹¹ in Trondheim for eight years. She emphasizes the unique student environment in Trondheim as decisive for her strong identification with the engineering profession. Thus, with an engineering education follows a strong socialization that categorizes you as an engineer. This argument also follows the logic of SCT, where the

¹¹ Norwegian University of Science and Technology. One of the most prominent schools in Norway for engineering

engineering student learn their category by differentiating and comparison between the ingroup (engineers) and the outgroup (others) (Anderson et al. 2010: 156).

4.2.2 ...and effect

In general, the degree to which an employee identify with a target of identification will have consequences for behaviour and attitudes towards the target (Johnson et al. 2006: 499). Therefore, whether an engineer identify more substantially with the profession than with the organization will affect how (s)he behaves towards both social categories. (S)he may, for example, be less dedicated to the general performance of the company and less committed to departmental issues, and more dedicated to the actual tasks at hand and the labour union. In the interviews, I asked for what consequences a prominent professional identification would have for the organizational identification.

My initial assumption, based on Turner's (1987) concept of functional antagonism, was that increased professional identification would result in a decreased organizational identification. On the contrary, however, most of the engineers reported that a high professional identification would actually bring about an increased loyalty to the organization, as long as the organization could be considered an engineering organization. Dina suggested that most engineers desire to do engineering tasks, which is an important aspect of being an engineer, i.e. the engineering identity (Anderson et al. 2010):

DINA: [...] Right, because I cannot imagine working as an engineer in the municipal, for example. Then, you are not primarily an engineer, you are more- if so, you work sort of in the municipal sector, by assisting with your knowledge, but here, you work in a company that is identified with being an engineer

It seems like an engineering organization, because it elevates engineering tasks, will enhance the engineering identity, hence giving rise to a stronger feeling of attachment to the organization as a whole. When I pursued the topic, Fredrik claimed that the engineering identification would enhance the attachment to the organization because "engineers are perhaps easier to satisfy like that, because if you only give them a problem, they are happy with it, right". Apparently, because engineering companies promotes complex and entertaining engineering tasks, the engineers remain loyal. This is congruent with Ashforth and Johnson's (2001: 37) argument that the higher order identification becomes more salient if the organization is "more or less uniquely associated with particular values and goals". If DNV GL represent a unique form of

engineering company, engineers will perhaps entertain a stronger feeling of identification towards that company than others will, thus enhancing loyalty.

In a quantitative study of veterinarians, another relatively strong profession, Johnson et al. (2006) found that the veterinarians with different types of employment situations preferred different targets of identification. The authors show that professionals identify more with their profession or workgroup than the organization, and they conclude that professionals in an organizational setting are likely to identify more with the most proximal targets of identifications (Johnson et al. 2006: 504). Furthermore, as a confirmation or elongation of Dina's above statement, they conclude that

[i]n sum, it appears that, for professionals, identification with the organization is less likely when the organization is not integrally linked to their profession. We suspect that this general pattern holds not just for veterinarians but for those in other professional occupations as well (Johnson et al. 2006: 505)

Implicitly for professionals, then, organizational identification is more likely to occur in organizations that are integrally linked to the profession in question, by virtue of either tasks and/or colleagues. Accentuating this argument, Gina ascribed the reason for increased loyalty not to tasks but to the considerable portion of colleagues with similar background, in other words the homogeneity. For Gina, the only one of the respondents with a doctorate, the portion of similarly highly educated co-workers were greater in DNV than it is in her current employing organization, and partly therefore, she have a stronger feeling of attachment to DNV. As she says, "[i]n that way, it is perhaps even easier to identify with the people at Veritas for me, since it is a stronger academic company".

Within an organizational context, a strong professional identification may induce other effects. For instance, Bjørn, suggested that the strong professional identification might lead to a disinterest in higher order organizational matters. He demonstrated this by pointing out that the average engineer's typical career path is horizontal, not vertical, as in many other occupations:

BJØRN: Well, it stretches very in breadth, instead of working that much upwards. And I believe that is very unique for our occupational group; that there are a great many professionally oriented, who work broadly instead of necessarily climbing upwards, and in that case this here organization means fuck all

Correspondingly, Fredrik emphasize that, since pursuing career is practically equivalent with administrative work, engineers stay in the same, or similar, positions for a long time. Engineers

are, in other words, less likely to pursue internal careers, because it will occur at the expense of the professionalism, and this will in turn result in a disinterest in organizational matters.

4.2.3 Summary

The evidence presented here supports a notion that the relationship between the organizational and professional identification “is not an ‘either-or’ proposition in terms of competing targets” (Rotondi 1975: 106). In short, professional identification, caused by the engineering labour market, a “nerdy” focus on engineering tasks, and/or a robust professional socialization, may both increase the identification with an professional organization, or deem organizational matters irrelevant for the engineers. Employee homogeneity and the nature of the organization are important factors decisive for the outcome of the relationship between professional and organizational identification.

So far, I have discussed organizational identification and professional identification as somewhat separate targets of identification. However, in a modern, flexible labour market, employees may identify with several targets of identification simultaneously. This is true not only for the vertical axis, where employees identify with different levels of the organization, but also for the horizontal axis, where employees identify with multiple different entities on the same abstraction level. Hence, it is important to assess the nature of multiple organizational identification. In the following, I will present the findings on multiple simultaneous identification.

4.3 Multiple simultaneous identification

Throughout the preceding analysis of identification in organizational settings (4.1) and professional identification (4.2), I have discussed different aspects of multiple identification. Among other things, we have seen that the engineers, both in this study and others, identify more with the lower orders of the organization than the higher, and that they identify more with their profession than their organization. I have also presented a model for multiple targets of organizational identification when changing jobs. Generally, the above analysis fall in line with Johnson and colleagues’ argument:

Thus, theory and empirical research suggest that organizational members often identify with multiple work-related targets (e.g., workgroup, organization, larger profession), and these different identification targets have a number of differential organizational implications (Johnson et al. 2006: 499).

Theory also suggests that organizational members choose between different identifications based on subjective importance and situational relevance (Ashforth and Johnson 2001: 32). Consequently, social identity theory suggests that individuals often identify with social entities because of the subjective importance of self-enhancement needs (Pratt 1998: 183). Employees thus often deem their social group, and therefore their social identities, as more positive than outgroups, and they “tend to invest more of their self-concept in valued personas” (Mael and Ashforth 1992: 105), i.e. social entities they consider valuable, because this enhances their sense of self-worth (Pratt 1998: 183). Pursuing this argument, for engineers the engineering identity and identification is more salient than the organizational identity and identification because they deem the former more personally valuable than the latter. Additionally, different identities and identifications are evoked dependent on the situation. Identification is therefore largely context dependent, determined both by the emphasis the individual places on the social entity in question and by how well the social entity fits the social setting. These factors are essential for understanding the nature of multiple identifications.

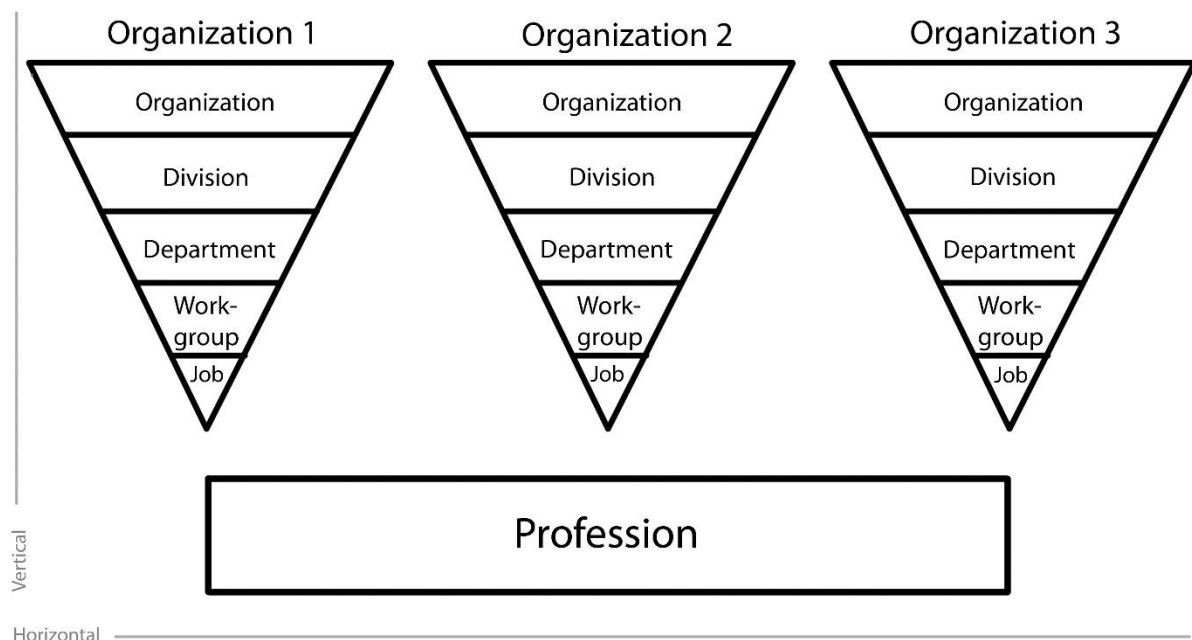


Figure 4. Multiple targets of identification, both vertically and horizontal.

Above you find a model of some available targets of identification in an organizational setting. In the model, the horizontal axis is exemplified by three organizations, and within each of the three organizations, there are different levels on the vertical axis with which the individual can identify, ranging from the higher order organizational identity to the lower level job or position. The profession is situated on the bottom of the vertical axis, illustrating that it is arguably more fundamental (at least for engineers) than other levels of the organization. The professional identification also transverse the organizational borders, since the profession ultimately exists independent of the organization.

For the respondents, multiple identifications in general is ubiquitous in their everyday life, while still being a distanced concept in terms of everyday awareness. In other words, it is a great part of their lives, but not a great part of their conceptual frames of reference. Therefore, the findings on the multiple nature of identification was harder to unearth and is thus far less evident than the findings on singular organizational identification, transitional organizational identification, and professional identification.

I have comprehensively documented that engineers sooner identify with their profession than with their organization, and that in some cases the organizational identity is more or less insignificant for the individual. How can one discuss multiple organizational identification for a group that largely and seemingly does not identify with their employing organizations? Fortunately, claiming that engineers *in general* do not identify with their employing organizations is an overstatement, or even erroneous: most individuals, engineer or not, maintain some sort of identification with the highest order of the organization such as the organizational identity. Evidence of identification with the higher order of the organization was also found in the interviews (cf. section 4.1.1).

As presented in the preliminary model in section 4.1.2, identification with more than one organization is possible. Supporting Anna's "room metaphor", Dina maintains that the identification never really diminishes, only changes.

DINA: [...] I think I'll always have a connection with M [current employer], but the affiliation to [...] DNV will become the same as I will have towards M if I begin in a new job, right. It becomes, like, "previous employer".

Dina, in other words, argues that identification with previous employers differs from the identification with current employer. When changing job, then, the M-identification will gain a

mental position in her mind similar to the DNV-identification. The concurrent identification with the previous employer might have some implications for both the individuals and the organizations, such as for example a loyalty issue.

4.3.1 A loyalty conflict?

When queried whether maintaining an identification to both current and previous employees potentially could cause a conflicting situation for the engineers, most proclaimed it was unproblematic. Three key arguments were discussed. First, some of the engineers viewed the potential for multiple identification as indicative for the modern society in general, and the young generation specifically. For example, when I asked the political scientist Anna whether multiple identifications perhaps could cause a conflicting situation for the individual, she respondent that

ANNA: [t]he younger [generation] perhaps very easily enters different arenas without feeling any form of loyalty conflict because of that. But I believe it is generation-dependent too. If you ask an older generation, they will perhaps be more aware that it may result in a conflict.

Because shifting identifications, or the ability to cognitively process and integrate multiple social categories simultaneously, is the norm in today's society, multiple organizational identifications seems feasible.

Secondly, some of the engineers debated the multiple organization-issue with reference to a 'production chain'-thinking and the idea of a higher industry goal. In this respect, loyalty problems instituted by multiple identifications is unproblematic because there is, in Bjørn's words, an implicit trade-off agreement between the organizations in the engineering sector, especially in the maritime, oil and gas sector. Christopher, for instance, claimed that the engineering sector is keeping alive the business cards makers, because of the vast networking and internal job mobility within the industry.

CHRISTOPHER: [...] because people changes [jobs] all the time, but we cannot do much else than what we usually do, so you sort of remain within the maritime cluster. [...] And some jumps over to the supplier side and in DNV and the ship-owner side, because many take that road as well.

Bjørn elaborates on his argument that there is a trade-off between the companies in the industry by accentuating that many of the employees in his current company came from the neighbouring competitor.

BJØRN: So, people scuttle about extensively. What I possibly would have taken from here to there and back again, that's something everyone benefit from. So, I think that it is a bigger goal with this than necessarily just S [current employer] as a company.

The goal, he suggests, is to “pump oil as cheap as possible and as safe as possible”, and in that situation, which company one works for does not really matter. Bjørn and Christopher here refer to the industry's (i.e. oil and gas, and maritime) goals as something universally approved and accepted. Whether the individual company's management is equally accepting and acclamatory is dubitable and rather unlikely. Nevertheless, the fact that some of the engineers accentuate an overarching industry goal is interesting because it add a higher dimension to the discussion. This notion of industry goals is also to some extent noted by Anderson et al. (2010). They discovered that the engineers in their study often depicted their work as beneficial and important for the greater society, and they appreciated their contribution to some goal greater than the work in itself (2010: 168).

The third discussion concerned the roles the engineers hold as company representatives. The engineering sector is largely characterized by a widespread interaction and cooperation between companies, and the employees operate within vast contact surfaces for interaction with employees from other companies. Thus, superficial connections with other (and often previous employing) organizations is inevitable. Gina accentuated the importance of role consciousness in relation to the loyalty problem, maintaining that “you have to be aware of what hat you wear at all times“. Fredrik similarly highlights that the job description of an engineer (often) induces role consciousness because that is “the most important when in such situations”. In short, the proclaimed role consciousness in the engineering sector seems to subdue the problem of loyalty since it is inherent to the engineers' job descriptions. Correspondingly, Erik refers to a presence of honesty among engineers:

ERIK: And there I believe engineers may be fairly conscientious and quite honest towards their previous company. I believe it is in a strong position among engineers. Engineers have rather high integrity in that way

These observations and arguments are, of course, subjective. The respondents were not unison in their responses, and the utterances were often disposed to doubts and hesitation. Nevertheless, one important common denominator protrude: multiple simultaneous identification is deemed more or less unproblematic among the engineers, irrespective of whether it is ascribed societal factors, a higher order industry thinking, or a high consciousness of roles in the engineering sector.

Many of the respondents, however, claimed the situation would be different if they transferred directly to a rivalling company, and/or working in the same business area, since it would result in conflicting identifications and interests. In their study of contract workers, George and Chattopadhyay (2005: 93-94) suggested that a salience hierarchy may as well function as a remedy for the potential conflicts associated with simultaneously identifying with two organizations. Without further elaboration from the authors, it is hard to say what the exact remedial effects to which they were referring. One assumption may be that whenever facing a potential loyalty conflict, an increased work focus (and identification) might function as a buffer. Moreover, ‘hiding’ behind an organizational identification may direct the focus to for example organizational policies, thus subduing the cognitive taxing situation. These are, however, just assumptions and it ought to be investigated further.

4.3.2 Conjoining orders of identification – higher and lower

One important discussion concerns the connection between the lower and higher order identities and identifications. For example, Dina emphasizes that the degree of identification with the previous employer depends on the nature of the new job in the new employing organization. If a prospective new position was to be similar to the position in the M-organization, she claims, “the affiliation to M will be stronger than to DNV”. There is, in other words, apparently a connection between the job identity, and therefore the individual’s identification with the job (“I am a HSE manager”), and the identification with the organization. The lower order identification, in that case, influences the higher order identification. Self-categorization theory states that the social self

[...] actively shapes and determines cognition by directing its functioning from the specific vantage point of a given self. Changing one’s self-definition can, in turn, change values, self-relevance, goals, knowledge the boundaries of social influence, the perception of agreement and disagreement, and so on (Turner 1999: 29)

If the salient job identity (i.e. the current vantage point of the given self) remains unchanged after a job change, then, the particular vantage point from which the individual cognition takes place largely remains the same. For example, if a pipeline engineer, defining herself principally in terms of her job, changes job from organization X to organization Y, while holding the position as a pipeline engineer, the transition period is likely to become less cognitively taxing since her salient identification remains unchanged. Whether a strong lower order identification

in a situation where you change employer but not job actually facilitates the transition is, to my knowledge, not yet empirically explored.

Ashforth and Johnson (2001) discuss the possibility that “multiple identities can form a *holistic gestalt* where the boundaries around each identity fade and the contents flow into a rich melange” (2001: 46-47). The idea is that in modern, complex organizations there is an interdependence between an employee’s nested identities (i.e. the identities embedded within an organization (Ashforth and Johnson 2001: 33)) because employees often are required to instantiate both higher and lower order identities simultaneously. This notion of holism effects two factors related to identification. First, a holistic identity synergy signifies that more than one subgroup identification can and will be salient simultaneously. Secondly, it indicates that the available identifications within an organizational context are interconnected. Cross-cutting identities (i.e. identities that transverse the nested identities, such as committee membership, friendship cliques (Ashforth and Johnson 2001: 33), but also professions) is increasingly important in a complex organizational sphere, where “knowledge, skills, and abilities draw on and transcend categorical identities derived from gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and so on” (Ashforth and Johnson 2001:47). Following this holism argument, organizations are composed of a multitude of identities and identifications available for its employees. The salience of one identification will then not ensue a decline in the other identifications within the organization, but rather to some extent enhance them, as in Dina’s example above.

As for multiple *organizational* identification, the holism argument purports that even a personal friendship with a previous colleagues induces identification with the organization within which the friendship commenced. From the interviews, one can discern a slight notion that the respondents juxtapose the identification with previous colleagues with the identification with the previous employing organization.

5 Discussion and conclusion

I have suggested that, within an organizational context, the individual have numerous available targets of identification. In addition, I have discussed the potential for a plurality of identifications by using the construct of *multiple simultaneous identifications*. However, multiple identification in organizational contexts is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that rely on both subjective factors (such as personal preferences, personal goals, and tenure) and situational factors (such as the actual setting, organizational features, and the nature of one's work). Therefore, the anterior analysis may at times appear inconclusive and incoherent. In order to address this inconclusiveness, in the following section I will elaborate on the findings in light of the topic questions and take the discussion some steps further.

5.1.1 Abridging the questions

The topic question in this thesis is threefold. In general, it concerns the overarching notion of multiple simultaneous identification, while at the same time asking specifically for multiple identification on the organizational (horizontal) level and on a vertical level. I will address the three questions in turn, starting with the latter.

What is the relationship between an individual's professional identification and organizational identification?

Most of the engineers in my study reported a higher and even more fundamental identification to their profession than their employers. As I have indicated, this precedence of profession over organization have at least three possible explanations. First, an *external* effect prompted by an advantageous and burgeoning engineering labour market renders the engineers less dependent on the organization to succeed. According to the respondents, this situation surface a shift in emphasis from the organization to the individual and the individual's proximal surroundings (co-workers, fellow engineers, the work-team, etc.). Secondly, and relatedly, *internal-personal* factors associated with the 'engineer stereotype' involves a consistent focus on the actual tasks and the most proximal social groups (Anderson et al. 2010). More than one of the respondents maintained that engineers are profoundly more "nerdy" (in a positive manner) than other professionals, which in turn induces the enhanced salience of the engineering identification. A third *internal-social* factor concerns the particular professional socialization associated with engineering. Through a rather concentrated education, the engineers internalize the profession

as a part of their self-concept: after graduating, you become *an engineer*. Interestingly, socialization has a twofold role in the relationship between professional and organizational identification. The respondents argued that the professional socialization they experienced through college induced the primacy of the professional identity over the identity of the organization, but this effect would diminish with tenure, since longer tenure in an organization convey a stronger organizational socialization, hence a stronger organizational identification.

As for the consequences of professional precedence over the organization, the respondents maintained that a high professional identification would enhance the organizational identification. This was especially true in professional organizations that, arguably, have more holographic features than non-professional organizations (Albert and Whetten 1985). This sentiment contradicts the functional antagonism thesis of Turner (1987), while supporting the assumption that multiple identification in the engineering sector is highly feasible, and even potentially advantageous. Another, somewhat inverted, argument were found among some of the respondents who maintained that a strong professional identification resulted in a disinterest in organizational matters. The organization only constitutes the frames within where the employees conjointly conduct engineering tasks. However, the accent seems to lie on the former consequence rather than the latter. Thus, to answer the question of what constitute the relationship between the professional and organizational identification, one can address two aspects. First, there is ostensibly a sentiment among engineers to give precedence to the engineering profession over the organization in terms of identification. However, and secondly, the relationship between these two identifications is complex-dependent, both on the nature of the organization and on the circumstances.

How does the identification process unfold for an engineer changing jobs?

To answer this question, I first elaborated on what happens with the organizational identification after quitting a job, in other words after the end of membership with a social group. According to the engineers, what happens is seemingly dependent on four aspects; *time* (tenure in the organization), *personal investment* (your overall material, social, and symbolic contribution to the organization), *prolonged contact* (formal or informal contact with either previous colleagues or the previous organization per se), and *organizational attributes* (values, organizational goals, the identity, etc.). In general, it seems like for some, the identification with the previous employer persists for some time, whereas others report an instantaneous

identification shift. Whether the identification continues or is replaced is ostensibly determined by these four aspects.

Based on the respondents' answers I introduced a preliminary model illustrating the organizational identification process when changing jobs. In the model, four different ideal typical scenarios were described: 1) replacement, 2) concurrent continuation, 3) recurrent continuation, and 4) no identification. Accordingly, for engineers, the identification process may unfold through these four scenarios. The model is applicable not only for studying dual organizational identification, but also generally for studying dual identification on the same abstraction level (when changing division, changing job, changing nation, and so on). I believe the model provides a useful means of studying the process of dual identification, as well as laying the foundation for future development and further research on the topic of multiple simultaneous identification. Nevertheless, it needs further amplification before befitting for general assessments of the plural and complex identification concept.

What constitutes the nature of multiple simultaneous identifications in the engineering sector?

The nature of multiple simultaneous identification is complex and multifaceted, partly because identity salience (and identification salience) is relative (Ashforth and Johnson 2001; Turner 1987). Following Turner and SCT, employees have number of *accessible* social categories with which they can identify, and the relative accessibility and salience of these categories is decided by some concrete factors, such as current goals, circumstances, recency, activation, and “the relationship to other accessible constructs” (Turner 1987: 129). This is an equivalent, but slightly more nuanced view than Ashforth and Johnson's (2001) emphasis on subjective importance and situational relevance as important for the salience of social categories.

Studying the nature of multiple simultaneous identifications was more challenging than originally assumed due to the abstractness of the concept. For the engineers, multiple identities and multiple identification unconsciously and almost automatically manifested on a regular basis, both through formal and informal connections with an array of social entities across the engineering sector. In addition to the reflections on the transitional identification process when job change, I asked the respondents about potential loyalty conflicts in relation to dual and multiple identification. Most of the engineers maintained that they experienced little or no cognitive conflict in terms of loyalty, neither in relation to possible prospective alumni programs nor in relation to job change. The respondents however reported that a potential

conflicting situation might occur when changing jobs between competitors. The potential, antecedents, and consequences for multiple identifications is ostensibly context-dependent. In general, however, the nature of multiple simultaneous identifications in the engineering sector appear rather unique, due to the pivotal and decisive role of the engineering profession.

5.2 Implications for organizations and individuals

As identification is a basic cognitive process influencing a vast variety of individual behaviour and attitudes, organizational identification is something organizations ought to take seriously (Scott 1997: 494). This is illustrated by the numerous studies elaborating on the outcomes of identification, such as intrinsic motivation, less conflict and thus better cooperation, employee compliance, behaviour in accordance with organizational goals, job satisfaction, and so on (Scott 1997: 494; van Knippenberg and van Schie 2000; Webber 2011; Pratt 1998; Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008). For the organizations, identification may also be used to gain control over organizational members (Pratt 1998: 184). However, I have shown that the engineers identify with the profession more than they identify with the employing organization. Based on the findings in the interviews it seems that for companies in the engineering sector, the best means of achieving a highly identifies staff is to attune professionalism and make it a central part of the organizational identity.

Another implication for organizations concerns the possibility for initiation of organizational alumni programs. Since multiple identifications is both feasible and ubiquitous, the interorganizational nature of organizational alumni will apparently cause no, or at least only minor, conflict in terms of loyalty. The initiation of alumni programs will also induce a prolonged identification with the organization, which in turn will be beneficial for the organization. Although feasible and potentially beneficial, few studies have investigated the actual consequences of initiating alumni programs for previous employees. In other words, more research is apt.

For the individual, identification with multiple social categories and entities simultaneously seems indicative for a (post)modern organizational sphere. In this thesis, I have shown that engineers quite straightforwardly identify with several targets of identification on both the horizontal and the vertical axis. Nevertheless, they do entertain a form of salience hierarchy (Ashforth and Johnson 2001) which gives prominence to proximal lower order categories over

distal higher order categories. This is especially true for the professional identification, which is directly linked to the engineering identity (Anderson et al. 2010). The strong professional identification seems to give the engineers some leeway in relation to organizational constraints and boundaries, allowing them to direct their attention to professional tasks and fellow professional co-workers.

5.3 Conclusion and a note on future research

Humans are social beings with a fundamental need for belongingness to social entities, which “reduces the uncertainty associated with interacting in new environments or with changes in familiar environments” (Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008: 336). The modern society and the modern organizational sphere is characterized by an increased flexibility, reflexivity, and uncertainty, which both generates a stronger need for individuals to identify with social entities and causes the individual to maintain and adhere to a multitude of identities and identifications simultaneously. Furthermore, social identification is associated with a range of positive and beneficial outcomes for both organization and individual. Therefore, identification in an organizational setting constitutes a vital part of organizational studies. Moreover, there is a tendency for private sector companies to implement (or at least talk about implementing) organizational alumni programs for their former employees. Such alumni programs are assumed to evoke a prolonged identification with the alma mater, which in turn append to the already existing organizational and professional identifications available for the individual.

Following a theoretical framework from social identity theory and self-categorization theory, the preceding analysis of seven qualitative interviews with previous employees of DNV GL exposed and elucidated three important topics. First, the engineers identify more fundamentally with their profession than with their employing organization, and the relationship between the professional identification and organizational identification have important outcomes for both organization and individual. Secondly, I have presented a model of dual identifications in a time of job change, where four ideal typical salience scenarios were presented. Finally, I have discussed the complexity of multiple simultaneous identifications in the engineering sector. Maintaining identification with several targets simultaneously both appears to be feasible and have important individual and organizational consequences.

Based on the available data, it is difficult to infer about causal relationships. In addition, a sample of seven respondents, where only six is engineers, gives the data limited generalization capabilities. However, given the pervasiveness of the engineers under study, the model and concepts presented here gives leeway for further extrapolation and analysis. Based on the respondents' answers, I have discussed the general nature of the multiple identification process in the engineering sector. Furthermore, I have utilized theoretical and empirical contributions on identification in organizational contexts to support and substantiate the findings. Although pervasive, future research ought to utilize larger samples with a greater variety of employers. I still believe the research field would greatly benefit from additional qualitative research, especially since the lion's share of the existing empirical data relies solely on quantitative methods. Additionally, the model proposed in section 4.1.3 has some fundamental limitations and it ought to be further elaborated and developed. If amplified sufficiently, the model might provide valuable for future research.

The concept of multiple simultaneous identification has only recently gained attention in social psychology, and I believe that the findings in this study is both relevant for the engineering sector in general as well as for other professions. The main goal here has been to elucidate the engineering-specific process of multiple simultaneous identification, a multi-faceted process distinguished by complexity and incoherence. A further examination on this process is both important and apt.

References

- Aakvaag, Gunnar C. (2008). *Moderne sosiologisk teori*. Oslo: Abstrakt forlag.
- Aale, Per Kristian and Sigurd Bjørnstad (2011). "Henter ferske russiske ingeniører". *Aftenposten*, Published 15.10.2011, http://www.aftenposten.no/jobb/Henter-ferske-russiske-ingeniorer-5560763.html#.U0llkPl_uSo (accessed 12.04.2014).
- Albert, Stuart, Blake E. Ashforth and Jane E. Dutton (2000). "Organizational identity and identification: Charting new waters and building new bridges." *Academy of Management Review* no. 25 (1): 13-17.
- Albert, Stuart and David A Whetten (1985). "Organizational identity." *Research in organizational behavior*.
- Anderson, Kevin John Boyett, Sandra Shaw Courter, Tom McGlamery, Traci M. Nathans-Kelly and Christine G. Nicometo (2010). "Understanding engineering work and identity: a cross-case analysis of engineers within six firms." *Engineering Studies* no. 2 (3): 153-174.
- Arthur, Michael B. and Denise M. Rousseau (1996). *The Boundaryless career: a new employment principle for a new organizational era*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ashforth, Blake E. (1998). "Becoming: How Does the Process of Identification Unfold?" In (eds.) David A Whetten and Paul C Godfrey, *Identity in organizations: Building theory through conversations*, 213-222. California: Sage.
- Ashforth, Blake E., Spencer H. Harrison and Kevin G. Corley (2008). "Identification in organizations: An examination of four fundamental questions." *Journal of Management* no. 34 (3): 325-374.
- Ashforth, Blake E. and Scott A. Johnson (2001). "Which Hat to Wear? The Relative Salience of Multiple Identities in Organizational Contexts." In (eds.) Michael A. Hogg and Deborah J. Terry, *Social identity processes in organizational contexts*, 31-48. Philadelphia: Psychology Press.
- Ashforth, Blake E. and Fred Mael (1989). "Social identity theory and the organization." *Academy of management review* no. 14 (1): 20-39.
- Barker, James R. and Phillip K. Tomkins (1994). "Identification in the Self-Managing Organization Characteristics of Target and Tenure." *Human Communication Research* no. 21 (2): 223-240.
- Barlatier, Pierre-jean, Michaël Bénédic, Emmanuel Josserand and Florence Villesèche (2013). "Le potentiel stratégique des réseaux d'anciens." *Revue française de gestion* (3): 163-182.
- Basioudis, Ilias G. (2007). "Auditor's engagement risk and audit fees: the role of audit firm alumni." *Journal of Business Finance & Accounting* no. 34 (9-10): 1393-1422.
- Bauman, Zygmunt (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Becker, Howard S. and James W. Carper (1956a). "The development of identification with an occupation." *American Journal of Sociology*: 289-298.
- Becker, Howard S. and James W. Carper (1956b). "The elements of identification with an occupation." *American Sociological Review* no. 21 (3): 341-348.
- Charmaz, Kathy (2001). "Ch . 32. Qualitative Interviewing and Grounded Theory Analysis." In (eds.) Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, *Handbook of Interview Research*. California: Sage.
- Charmaz, Kathy (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. California: Pine Forge Press.

- Dukerich, Janet M., Roderick Kramer and Judi McLean Parks (1998). "The Dark Side of Organizational Identification." In (eds.) David A. Whetten and Paul C. Godfrey, *Identity in organizations: Building theory through conversations*, 245-256. California: Sage.
- Dutton, Jane E., Janet M. Dukerich and Celia V. Harquail (1994). "Organizational images and member identification." *Administrative science quarterly* no. 39 (2).
- Edwards, Martin R. (2005). "Organizational identification: A conceptual and operational review." *International Journal of Management Reviews* no. 7 (4): 207-230.
- Elsbach, Kimberly D. (1998). "The process of Social Identification: With What Do We Identify?" In (eds.) David A. Whetten and Paul C. Godfrey, *Identity in organizations: Building theory through conversations*, 232-237. California: Sage.
- Fivelsdal, Egil, Odd Nordhaug and Jørgen Frode Bakka (2004). *Organisasjon og ledelse: struktur, prosesser, læring og kultur*. Oslo: Cappelen akademisk forlag.
- George, Elizabeth and Prithviraj Chattopadhyay (2005). "One foot in each camp: The dual identification of contract workers." *Administrative Science Quarterly* no. 50 (1): 68-99.
- Giddens, Anthony (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Glaser, Barney G. and Anselm L. Strauss (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Gobo, Giampietro (2004). "Sampling, representativeness and generalizability." In (eds.) Clive Seale and Anne Ryen, *Qualitative research practice*, 405-426. London: Sage.
- Gouldner, Alvin W. (1957). "Cosmopolitans and locals: toward an analysis of latent social roles. I." *Administrative science quarterly*: 281-306.
- He, Hongwei and Andrew D. Brown (2013). "Organizational identity and organizational identification A review of the literature and suggestions for future research." *Group & Organization Management* no. 38 (1): 3-35.
- Heckman, Robert and Audrey Guskey (1998). "The relationship between alumni and university: toward a theory of discretionary collaborative behavior." *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* no. 6 (2): 97-112.
- Hogg, Michael A. and Deborah I. Terry (2000). "Social identity and self-categorization processes in organizational contexts." *Academy of management review* no. 25 (1): 121-140.
- Hogg, Michael A. and Deborah J. Terry (2001). *Social identity processes in organizational contexts*. Philadelphia: Psychology Press.
- Hogg, Michael A. and Graham M. Vaughan (2005). *Social psychology*. Harlow: Pearson, Prentice Hall.
- Johnson, Michael D., Frederick P. Morgeson, Daniel R. Ilgen, Christopher J. Meyer and James W. Lloyd (2006). "Multiple professional identities: examining differences in identification across work-related targets." *Journal of Applied Psychology* no. 91 (2): 498.
- Kreiner, Glen E and Blake E Ashforth (2004). "Evidence toward an expanded model of organizational identification." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* no. 25 (1): 1-27.
- Kvale, Steinar (1997). *Interview: en introduktion til det kvalitative forskningsinterview*. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Kvale, Steinar (2007). *Doing interviews*. Vol. 2. London: Sage.
- Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann (2009). *Det kvalitative forskningsinterview*. 2nd ed. Oslo: Gyldendal akademisk.
- Lammers, John C., Yannick L. Atouba and Elizabeth J. Carlson (2013). "Which Identities Matter? A Mixed-Method Study of Group, Organizational, and Professional Identities

- and Their Relationship to Burnout." *Management Communication Quarterly* no. 27 (4): 503-536.
- Larsen, Ann Kristin (2007). *En enklere metode: veiledning i samfunnsvitenskapelig forskningsmetode*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Larson, Gregory S. and Gerald L. Pepper (2003). "Strategies For Managing Multiple Organizational Identifications A Case of Competing Identities." *Management Communication Quarterly* no. 16 (4): 528-557.
- Lennox, Clive S. and Chul W. Park (2007). "Audit Firm Appointments, Audit Firm Alumni, and Audit Committee Independence." *Contemporary Accounting Research* no. 24 (1): 235-258.
- Mael, Fred A. and Blake E. Ashforth (1992). "Alumni and their alma mater: A partial test of the reformulated model of organizational identification." *Journal of organizational Behavior* no. 13 (2): 103-123.
- Maslow, Abraham Harold (1943). "A theory of human motivation." *Psychological review* no. 50 (4): 370.
- Miller, Vernon D, Mike Allen, Mary K Casey and John R Johnson (2000). "Reconsidering the organizational identification questionnaire." *Management Communication Quarterly* no. 13 (4): 626-658.
- Newman, Melissa D. and Joseph M. Petrosko (2011). "Predictors of alumni association membership." *Research in Higher Education* no. 52 (7): 738-759.
- Olsen, Kjell A. (2011). "Oljeingeniører vasser i jobbtilbud". *Aftenposten*, Published 18.10.2011, http://www.aftenposten.no/jobb/article4212952.ece#.U0llmPl_uSo (accessed 12.04.2014).
- Pratt, Michael G. (1998). "To Be or Not to Be? Central Questions in Organizational Identification." In (eds.) David A. Whetten and Paul C. Godfrey, *Identity in organizations: Building theory through conversations*, 171-206. California: Sage.
- Pratt, Michael G. and Peter O. Foreman (2000). "Classifying managerial responses to multiple organizational identities." *Academy of Management Review* no. 25 (1): 18-42.
- Pratt, Michael G., Kevin W. Rockmann and Jeffrey B. Kaufmann (2006). "Constructing professional identity: The role of work and identity learning cycles in the customization of identity among medical residents." *Academy of Management Journal* no. 49 (2): 235-262.
- Riketta, Michael (2005). "Organizational identification: A meta-analysis." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* no. 66 (2): 358-384.
- Rotondi, Jr., Thomas (1975). "Organizational identification: Issues and implications." *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* no. 13 (1): 95-109.
- Schiefloe, Per Morten (2003). *Mennesker og samfunn: innføring i sosiologisk forståelse*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Scott, Craig R. (1997). "Identification with multiple targets in a geographically dispersed organization." *Management Communication Quarterly* no. 10 (4): 491-522.
- Silverman, David (2013). *Doing qualitative research: a practical handbook*. 4th ed. California: Sage.
- Sjøberg, Jeanette (2013). "De er ansatt for annen gang". Published 18/8 - 2013, <http://www.aftenposten.no/jobb/De-er-ansatt-for-annen-gang-7282422.html> (accessed 15/11-2013).
- Sjøberg, Jeanette (2014a). "De sliter med å finne de rette folkene". *Aftenposten*, Published 07.04.2014, http://www.aftenposten.no/jobb/De-sliter-med-a-finne-de-rette-folkene-7529024.html#.U0_0Ffl_uYU (accessed 17.04.2014).

- Sjøberg, Jeanette (2014b). "Kun én prosent trenger humanister". *Aftenposten*, Published 07.04.2014, http://www.aftenposten.no/jobb/Kun-n-prosent-trenger-humanister-7527030.html#.U0_1Svl_uyV (accessed 17.04.2014).
- Stephens, Keri K. and Stephanie L. Dailey (2012). "Situational Organizational Identification in Newcomers Impacts of Preentry Organizational Exposure." *Management Communication Quarterly* no. 26 (3): 404-422.
- Sullivan, Sherry E. (1999). "The changing nature of careers: A review and research agenda." *Journal of management* no. 25 (3): 457-484.
- Sved, Børge (2012a). "Ingeniørstudentene vasser i jobbtilbud". *Adresseavisen*, Published 8.02.2012, <http://www.adressa.no/nyheter/okonomi/article1771092.ece> (accessed 12.04.2014).
- Sved, Børge (2012b). "Mangler 16000 ingeniører". *Adresseavisen*, Published 12.01.2013, <http://www.adressa.no/jobb/article1756326.ece> (accessed 12.04.2014).
- Tajfel, Henri (1978). *Differentiation between social groups: Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations*. London: Academic Press.
- Tajfel, Henri (1981). *Human groups and social categories: Studies in social psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tajfel, Henri (1982). "Social psychology of intergroup relations." *Annual review of psychology* no. 33 (1): 1-39.
- Tajfel, Henri and John C. Turner (1985). "The social identity theory of intergroup behavior." In (eds.) Stephen Worchel and William G. Austin, *Psychology of intergroup relations*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall
- The Economist (2014). "Corporate alumni: Gone but not forgotten". *The Economist*, Published 1.3.2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/business/21597935-more-firms-are-seeking-stay-touch-former-staff-gone-not-forgotten> (accessed 9.5.2014).
- Turner, John C. (1987). *Rediscovering the social group: a self-categorization theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Turner, John C. (1999). "Some Current Issues in Research on Social Identity and Self-categorization Theories." In (eds.) Naomi Ellemers, Russell Spears and Bertjan Doosje, *Social identity: context, commitment, content*, 6-34. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Van Dick, Rolf (2004). "My job is my castle: Identification in organizational contexts." *International review of industrial and organizational psychology* no. 19: 171-204.
- van Dick, Rolf, Ulrich Wagner, Jost Stellmacher and Oliver Christ (2004). "The utility of a broader conceptualization of organizational identification: which aspects really matter?" *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* no. 77 (2): 171-191.
- van Knippenberg, Daan and Els C. M. van Schie (2000). "Foci and correlates of organizational identification." *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* no. 73 (2): 137-147.
- Wallace, Jean E. (1995). "Organizational and professional commitment in professional and nonprofessional organizations." *Administrative Science Quarterly*: 228-255.
- Warren, Carrol A. B. (2001). "Ch. 4. Qualitative interviewing." In (eds.) Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, *Handbook of Interview Research*, 83-102. California: Sage.
- Webber, Sheila Simsarian (2011). "Dual organizational identification impacting client satisfaction and word of mouth loyalty." *Journal of Business Research* no. 64 (2): 119-125.

Word count: 24 866

All references utilized in this thesis are listed.

Appendix 1: Figures

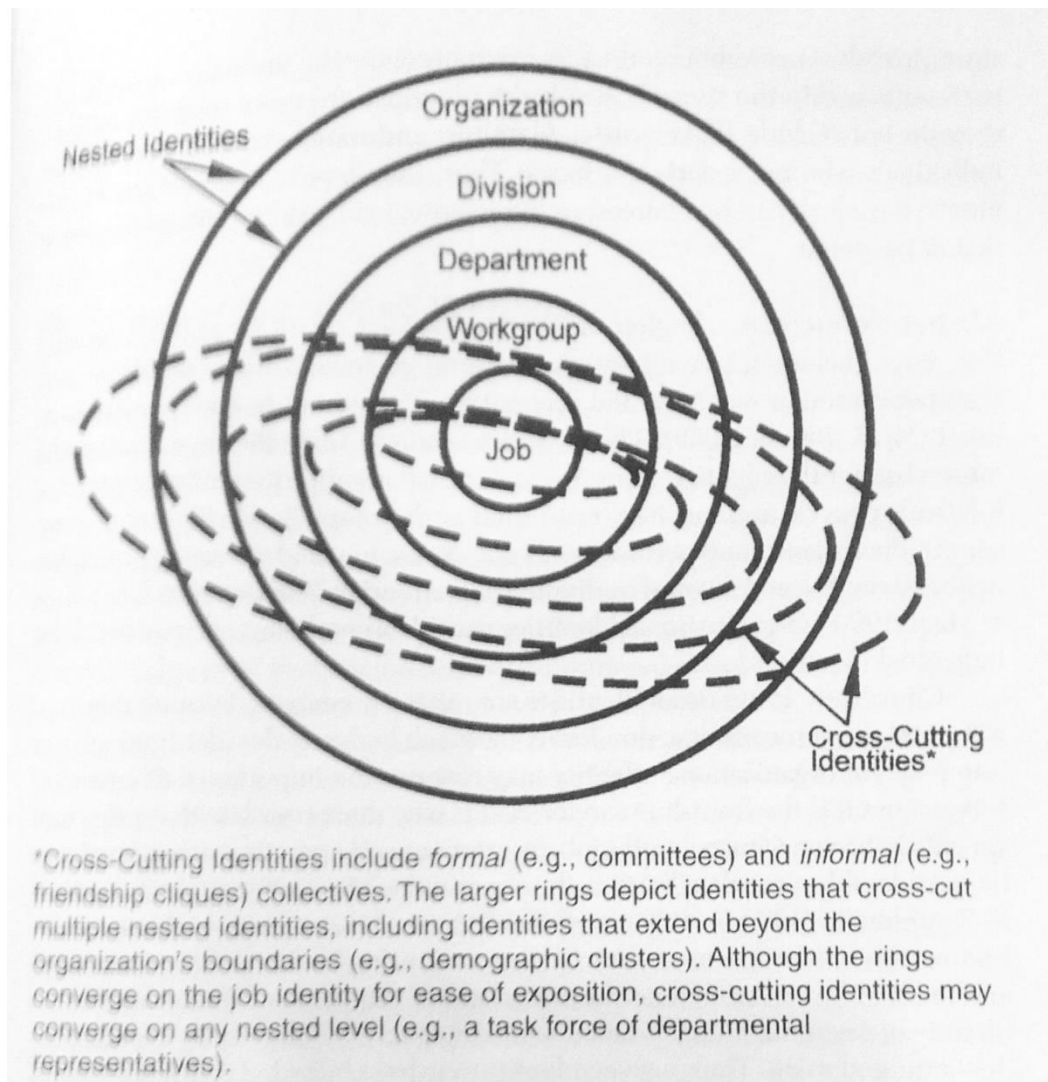


Figure 5. Nested and cross-cutting identities (Ashforth and Johnson 2001: 33)

Appendix 2: Interview guide

Eventuelle spørsmål til prosjektet/intervjuet før vi starter?

- 1. Kan du starte med å presentere deg selv?**
 - a. Utdanning, tidligere arbeidserfaring, fritidsinteresser/frivillighet, deltakelse i frivillige organisasjoner

Om egen identifisering

- 2. Hvis du skulle presentere deg for en ny bekjent, hva er det første du ville ha sagt?**
 - a. Ingeniør, organisasjon, familie, kommer det an på?
 - b. Hvorfor det? Har dette endret seg i løpet av livet? Variert med organisasjonstilhørighet?
- 3. Vil du si at du først og fremst er ansatt i organisasjonen/organisasjonsmedlem eller ingeniør?**
 - a. Unikt for ingeniører? Medlem vs ansatt. .
- 4. Hvordan tror du at denne tilknytningen til en profesjon påvirker tilknytningen til en arbeidsgiver?**
- 5. Hvor viktig har dine arbeidsrelasjoner vært for deg som person?**

Om tilknytning til organisasjoner

- 1. Hva gjorde at du valgte DNV som arbeidsplass?**
 - a. Med tanke på identifisering, verdier, holdninger, muligheter, tilfeldigheter, affinity vs emulation.
- 2. Hvor godt følte du at organisasjonen passet til deg som person?**
 - a. Før du starta, i løpet av arbeidstiden, da det nærmet seg slutten, eksempel
- 3. Var det noen spesiell grunn som gjorde at du slutta?**
 - a. Mtp. Identifisering, tilknytning. Identifisering endres over tid. Hadde antakelser som viste seg å ikke stemme?
- 4. Skjedde det noe med følelsen av tilknytning til DNV da du slutta? Hva end da du slutta i de øvrige jobbene dine?**
 - a. Vedvarer lojalitet til produkt, verdier, personer, emosjonell tilknytning
 - b. Forsvinner gradvis, forblir sterk lenge, forsvinner fort, erstattes tilknytning?
 - c. Hvor lang tid tar det?
- 5. Hvordan har tilknytningen foregått i øvrige organisasjonene?**
 - a. Har du måtte tilpasse dine egne oppfatninger og holdninger eller har du søkt organisasjoner som passer deg som person? Eventuelt andre årsaker
 - b. Har prosessen vært annerledes?
- 6. Tror du at det ville ha vært annerledes hvis du forlot organisasjonen ufrivillig eller etter en tvist?**
 - a. Disidentifisering
- 7. Hva slags forhold har du til dine tidligere arbeidsplasser i dag?**
 - a. Produkter, tjenester, kollegaer

Om å ha “multiple simultaneous identifications”

- 1. Man er emosjonelt og formelt knyttet til flere ting, som familie, venner, jobben, profesjonen, golfklubben, lokalsamfunnet ved hytta, osv. På hvilken måte forholder du deg til flere slike tilknytninger samtidig?**
 - a. Hvordan balanserer du forskjellige tilknytninger?
 - b. Spesielt med tanke på like organisasjoner. DNV – kontraktjobbing, profesjon
- 2. Hva med tilknytning til ulike nivåer innen en organisasjon? For eksempel avdeling, organisasjon, lunsjgruppe,**
 - a. Hva er opplevelsen din med tanke på det? Spenningforhold
- 3. Noen har trukket frem at det å ha tilknytninger til flere organisasjoner samtidig ikke er problematisk så lenge disse organisasjonene er forskjellige, mens andre mener at det er problematisk uansett. Hva tenker du om dette?**
- 4. Hvis mange organisasjoner i ingeniørsektoren skulle begynne med alumninettverk for sine ansatte (for eksempel Statoil, FMC, DNV GL, Aker, osv), ville dette ha vært en mulig situasjon?**
 - a. Ser du noen potensielle ulemper? Fordeler?
- 5. Ville det ha vært ønskelig?**
 - a. Fra ditt perspektiv. Fra organisasjonenes perspektiv. Hvorfor?

Andre tanker

Debrief

Appendix 3: Information letter

Takk for din interesse! Din deltakelse er verdifull og du vil bidra til å utvikle et veldig underutviklet forskningsområde innen sosialpsykologien/sosiologien.

Bakgrunn og formål

Ansvarlig for denne masteroppgaven er Morten Sars, masterstudent i Organisasjon, ledelse og arbeid ved Universitetet i Oslo. Oppgavens veileder er Haldor Byrkjeflot (epost haldor.byrkjeflot@sosgeo.uio.no).

Overordnet tema for oppgaven er «Organizational alumni and multiple simultaneous identifications». Som en del av prosjektet skal det undersøkes hva ingeniører tenker og mener om identifisering og tilknytning til nåværende arbeidsgiver og tidligere arbeidsgivere. Formålet er å svare på i hvilken grad individer kan opprettholde identifikasjoner og bånd til flere organisasjoner samtidig. I tillegg vil det stilles spørsmål knyttet til relasjonen mellom profesjonsidentifisering og organisasjonsidentifisering.

Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?

For å svare på problemstillingen vil det foretas dybdeintervjuer av 6-10 tidligere ansatte i DNV GL. Intervjuene vil vare i 1-1,5 timer. Årsaken til at intervjuobjektene skal være tidligere ansatte i den nevnte bedriften er at dette gir grunnlag for sammenligning. For å forenkle analysen vil intervjuene bli tatt opp med lydopptaker. I tillegg til dybdeintervjuet vil intervjuobjektene bli bedt om å fylle ut et kort spørreskjema med bakgrunnsinformasjon.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. Kun den ansvarlige for prosjektet vil ha tilgang til personopplysninger og opplysningene vil oppbevares på et sikkert sted. I tillegg vil transkripsjonene (utskrifter av intervjuene) bli anonymisert. Ingen informasjon eller sitater benyttet i oppgaven vil kunne føres tilbake til deg.

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes 15. juni 2014, og alt datamateriale med personopplysninger (navnelister, lydopptak, notater) vil slettes/anonymiseres ved prosjektslutt. Prosjektet er meldt inn til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste (NSD)

All deltakelse i studien er frivillig, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn.

Hvis du har ytterligere spørsmål, ikke nøl med å ta kontakt!

Appendix 4: Background information form

Navn:

Utdanning:

Alder:

Nåværende arbeidsplass:

Nåværende stilling:

Fem tidligere arbeidsplasser (kronologisk: øverst = nærmest i tid)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Medlem av alumninettverk i regi av høyskole/universitet?

Medlem av alumninettverk i regi av organisasjon?